



Housing and Growth

25 October 2022

Title

Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Report of

Chair of the Housing and Growth Committee

Wards

All

Status

Public

Urgent

No

Key

Yes

Enclosures

Housing Strategy Summary Evidence Base

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Summary

This report recommends that officers are instructed to prepare a new draft Housing Strategy and a new draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and sets out emerging themes for both these strategies. Officers have updated the evidence base that supports the Housing Strategy, and a summary version of this is attached at Appendix 1. The report also includes information about changes and events that have occurred since the current Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy were last agreed by the council in 2019.

Officers Recommendations

1. That the Committee endorses the emerging themes for the new Housing Strategy and instructs the Deputy Chief Executive to prepare an updated draft strategy for consideration by the Housing and Growth Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2023.
2. That the Committee endorses the emerging themes for the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and instructs the Deputy Chief Executive to prepare an updated draft strategy for consideration by the Housing and Growth Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2023.

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

- 1.1 The council's Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy both date from 2019, and since their implementation there have been significant changes in the housing landscape that make the introduction of new strategies timely. These changes include:
- A change in the council's administration in May 2022; the administration's manifesto included a number of housing-related priorities, including those concerning the supply of affordable housing for rent and for ownership, sustainability, and private tenants' rights.
 - The release of the Social Housing White Paper in November 2020, which sets out central government's housing-related priorities.
 - The release of other White Papers that have an impact on housing-related priorities, including the Private Rented Sector White Paper (June 2022), Social Care White Paper (December 2021), and Levelling Up White Paper (February 2022)
 - New legislation including the Fire Safety Act 2021, the Building Safety Act 2022, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Renters Reform Bill, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, and the Social Housing Regulation Bill.
 - Updates to key Barnet strategies, some of which are currently being reviewed following the change in administration, or new strategies in development including the Barnet Plan 2021-25, Growth Strategy 2020-30, the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-25, Cost of Living Strategy, Sustainability Strategy, and the Local Plan.
 - The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing rise in cost of living.
 - A change in the government's direction on the Rent Policy, ending the previous four-year rent reduction from April 2020, and a proposed rent cap from 1 April 2023 due to high inflation rates in 2022.
- 1.2 Officers have updated the summary evidence base (Appendix 1) that supports the Housing Strategy. A new Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) has not been commissioned due to the timing of the release of the latest Census results; however, a review will be undertaken of the key population information changes and assumptions will be tested as the detailed results from the 2021 Census are gradually released over the coming months. Officers are also updating the evidence base for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to provide essential information on housing and homelessness needs, trends, profiles, and contributory factors in support of the development of both strategies.
- 1.3 The updated evidence base shows a great deal of continuity in the trends that drove the 2019 Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and there is therefore a degree of continuity in the themes for the new strategies, whilst the detail will drive forward the council's ambitions to ensure residents can thrive, diverse needs are met and supported, more affordable, quality homes are provided, and sustainability goals are met. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy's emerging themes are also influenced by the Government's 'Homelessness Code of Guidance' on publishing a homelessness strategy. The exact wording of the themes for both strategies will remain under review and may further evolve to clearly articulate the aims below as the strategies are developed.

1.4 Barnet has a diverse and ageing population, there are increasing challenges in securing suitable homes for those who are most in need, and the cost of living pressures faced by residents have increased. Housing costs continue to rise fast relative to both local median incomes and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates which results in a continued affordability gap, there are challenges in supply to meet demand, and there are increasing pressures on the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund due to cost of living pressures on rental income, the affordable temporary accommodation capital programme, and costs associated with fire safety works and achieving carbon neutral and energy efficiency goals.

1.5 It is recommended that the new Housing Strategy focuses on the following themes:

- **Prevent homelessness and support rough sleepers off the streets.** *[Note: to be articulated through the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy]*
- **Deliver the right homes in the right places.** Barnet has a rising and ageing population, high house prices and private rent levels, and a lack of affordable housing to meet need, with growing challenges in supply. While the Local Plan sets the policy framework and targets for new homes, the Housing Strategy will focus on how the council will deliver new, affordable homes. This theme will focus on increasing the supply of affordable homes for rent and ownership, and aiming to meet diverse needs through an increased supply of suitable housing.
- **Ensure safe, sustainable council housing.** This theme will focus on driving Barnet's continued compliance with building and fire safety requirements in its council housing stock to prioritise and ensure the safety and security of its residents, as well as in meeting national and local sustainability, energy efficiency, and carbon neutrality targets.
- **Raise quality and standards in the private rented sector.** The private rented sector is home to a high proportion of Barnet's residents, and affordability constraints mean that for many it is a way of life. This theme will focus on continuing to champion the rights of private renters by setting clear standards for the private rented sector and supporting landlords to meet them, exploring the expansion of enforcement standards and taking action against landlords, raising awareness of private tenants' rights through a Private Tenants' Rights Charter, and providing information about sustainability and decent, safe, and secure homes.
- **Support living well by promoting healthy homes and wellbeing.** Good housing can help support general wellbeing and positive life outcomes, as well as other council objectives such as being family friendly, helping older and vulnerable people to live independently, and supporting educational attainment and wellbeing in children. This theme will focus on working in partnership, especially on improving and raising awareness of support, advice, and information to assist residents across the borough, particularly on helping to mitigate the cost of living crisis in relation to housing (including fuel poverty, energy efficiency, and water efficiency) with strong links to the council's emerging Cost of Living workstream, as well as on creating sustainable, resilient, and safe communities, providing information about housing-related support, enhancing broadband and digital access, and looking to better meet residents' needs so they can stay in their homes for longer including through adaptations. It will include a focus on the council using its voice to advocate for residents locally and nationally on housing-related issues such as housing shortage, sustainability and good design, welfare reform, longer tenancies, homelessness, and building safety and cladding.

1.6 Preventing and reducing homelessness and taking steps to end rough sleeping continue to be a focus for the council. Under section 3(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 a homelessness strategy means a strategy for: (a) preventing homelessness in the district; (b) securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless; and, (c) securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in the district who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again. It is recommended that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy focuses on the following themes:

- **Prevent homelessness.** Focusing on identifying those most at risk, tackling the root causes of homelessness, partnership working to ensure early intervention and ‘upstreaming’ this where possible, preventing recurring homelessness, and improving awareness, advice, and information.
- **Ensure a sufficient supply of accommodation.** Focusing on accessing social housing and the private sector, using assets effectively, reducing the use of temporary accommodation, bringing empty properties back into use, and looking to address specialist needs including supported housing, domestic abuse, and accessible properties [*Note: Housing Strategy to support and focus on some of these thematic areas*].
- **Provide support for people who are or have been homeless.** Focusing on partnership working to provide support (particularly single people at particular risk, rough sleepers, families, victims of domestic abuse, and households in temporary accommodation), including housing-related support and personal support including with domestic abuse, mental health problems, drug and alcohol addiction, poverty, debt, and unemployment.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The change in local administration, in addition to the changes in the operating and legislative environment set out in Section 1 of this report and the updated evidence base at Appendix 1, mean that the priorities in the Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy need to be reviewed and updated.

2.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on each local authority to carry out a review of homelessness and develop a strategy every 5 years.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

3.1 The council could decide to not review the Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy at this stage; however, this is not recommended due to the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002, and as the documents will not reflect the changes that have occurred since 2019 or the emerging priorities of the current administration.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 Officers will prepare a draft Housing Strategy and draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for consideration by the Housing and Growth Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2023.
- 4.2 The council will engage with key partners and stakeholders, including early engagement with residents, when developing the draft strategies. Subject to the agreement of the Housing and Growth Committee, wider consultation on the draft Housing Strategy and draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will take place during the Spring and Summer 2023, and a further draft that takes account of this will be brought back to the Housing and Growth Committee in September 2023.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 A new Corporate Plan is in development, with an approach being built around a council that cares for people, our places, and the planet, as discussed at the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 29 September 2022. Under the People priority, it aims to be family friendly, tackle inequality, and support health and independence. Under the Place priority, it aims to ensure safe, attractive neighbourhoods, sustainable growth, and thriving town centres and a fun place to visit. Under the Planet priority, it aims to focus on its journey to net zero, local environment, and green spaces. The Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will contribute significantly to these key priorities and the council's overall transformation programme.
 - 5.1.2 The Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021 to 2025 recognises that the condition of and access to local housing has an important role in the quality of life and health of both individuals and communities.
 - 5.1.3 Barnet's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment highlights that there is a long-term shift in housing tenure towards renting and away from owner occupancy (either outright or with a mortgage), reflecting a sustained reduction in housing affordability and an imbalance between housing demand and supply.
 - 5.1.4 The Growth Strategy 2020 to 2030 includes priorities to increase the supply of housing, deliver more homes that people can afford, deliver homes on public sector land, and support our growing older population. The Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy contribute to these priorities under the Growth Strategy's theme of 'a growing borough'.
- ### **5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**
- 5.2.1 A consultant may be commissioned to support early engagement with residents on the Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The cost of this will be met from existing budgets.
 - 5.2.2 The costs of producing the draft Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will otherwise be met within existing resources through The Barnet

Group's strategy function.

5.3 Legal and Constitutional References

5.3.1 Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 provides that a local housing authority in England may from time to time

- (a) carry out a homelessness review for their district; and
- (b) formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review.

The legislation also expects that the homelessness strategy will be renewed within five years of the last one being published.

5.3.2 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. It also requires housing authorities to provide homelessness services, in some form, to all those affected, not just those who have 'priority need'.

5.3.3 Section 29 of the Deregulation Act 2015 abolished the statutory requirement for English authorities to produce a housing strategy as previously required by section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003.

5.3.4 Where a Greater London authority has a local housing strategy, section 333D of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 provides that this should be in general conformity with the Mayor's London Housing Strategy.

5.3.5 The council's Constitution (Article 7 – Committees, Forums, Working Groups, and Partnerships) sets out the responsibilities of the Housing and Growth Committee which include:

- housing (including housing strategy, homelessness, social housing and housing grants, private sector housing and leasing, housing licencing and enforcement, HRA Revenue Account and Capital Programme).

5.4 Insight

5.4.1 The Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be informed by evidence bases, which will include insight gained through the Health Workplan's Homeless Prevention and Insight Project. A summary of the Housing Strategy evidence base is appended to this report.

5.5 Social Value

5.5.1 There are no specific Social Value aspects to this report; however, outcomes that are ultimately delivered through the new Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will take into account the delivery of social value through any procurement that is undertaken. It should be noted that the strategies themselves will additionally secure wider social, economic, and environmental benefits through delivery of their objectives.

5.6 Risk Management

5.6.1 There is a risk if the Housing Strategy is not updated that the current strategy does not reflect the significant contextual changes summarised at section 1.1 of this report, and that the housing requirements of the borough are not met

5.6.2 There is a risk if the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is not updated that the current strategy does not reflect the significant contextual changes summarised at section 1.1 of this report, and that homelessness may increase if the council does not update the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and set out the measures it will take to tackle homelessness and support rough sleepers off the streets.

5.7 Equalities and Diversity

5.7.1 Equality and diversity issues are a mandatory consideration in the decision making of the council. This requires elected Members to satisfy themselves that equality considerations are integrated into day-to-day business and that all proposals emerging from the finance and business planning process have properly taken into consideration what impact, if any, there is on any protected group and what mitigating factors can be put in place.

5.7.2 The Equality Act 2010, Section 149 sets out the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires Public Bodies to 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 characteristic and persons who do not share it.

5.7.3 The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnership.

5.7.4 Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- a) Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
- c) Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

5.7.5 Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken to assess the potential impacts of the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and will feed into the final versions. Equality impact will also be monitored post-implementation, as required.

5.8 Corporate Parenting

5.8.1 Council housing remains the most affordable housing option for care leavers, and

therefore the Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy are expected to have a direct, and positive impact on looked after children and care leavers, and to help ensure they have safe and appropriate accommodation to meet their needs, and access to suitable advice and information.

5.8.2 In the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, this will include through all three proposed themes of preventing homelessness, ensuring a sufficient supply of accommodation, and providing support for people who are or have been homeless. In the Housing Strategy, this will include through the proposed themes of delivering the right homes in the right places, and supporting living well by promoting healthy homes and wellbeing.

5.8.2 The strategies will play a key part in helping the council to ensure it, as a corporate parent to all children in care and care leavers, has regard to the need to act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those children and young people, help them gain access to and make the best use of services provided, promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for them, help ensure they are safe and have stability in their home lives, and prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

5.9 Consultation and Engagement

5.9.1 There has not been any specific consultation on the issues arising in this report. Early engagement and public consultation will be undertaken on the new draft Housing Strategy and draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy as part of their development timetable.

6 Environmental Impact

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications from noting the recommendations. Implementing the recommendations in the report will lead to a neutral impact on the council's carbon and ecology impact. Environmental impact will be considered in the drafting of the new Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Relevant previous decisions are listed in the table below.

Item	Decision	Link
Item 8, Housing Committee, 1 April 2019	Approved Housing Strategy 2019-2024	https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Clid=699&MId=9740&Ver=4
Item 9, Housing Committee, 1 April 2019	Approved Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024	https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Clid=699&MId=9740&Ver=4
Item 10, Housing and Growth Committee, 13 June 2022	Noted proposed timetable for the review of the Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy	https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Clid=696&MId=11083&Ver=4