

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 18 April 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director - Environment & Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Environment and Urban Renewal

SUBJECT: Production of Borough wide Housing Strategy

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek support of Executive Board for the commissioning and production of a new Borough wide Housing Strategy and approval to undertake stakeholder engagement and wider community consultation as an integral part of the production process.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

The Board:

- 1) Endorse the commissioning and production of a new Borough wide Housing Strategy and supporting evidence base;**
- 2) Provides delegated approval to the Executive Director Environment & Regeneration, in consultation with Portfolio Holder for Environment and Urban Renewal, to agree details of the Housing strategy production, including draft documentation and activity for stakeholder engagement and wider community consultation; and**
- 3) Upon completion of the production and consultation process, receive a further report seeking a recommendation to Council that the new Borough wide Housing Strategy be approved.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 At its meeting on the 6th March 2024, the Council approved the adoption of a new Corporate Plan. This Plan sets out the main vision, themes and values of the Council. The Plan includes six priorities to direct the resources of the Council (and influence our partners) for next five years. Priority six of the Plan being:

“Valuing and appreciating Halton and Our Communities – Supporting Halton’s residents to live in decent and affordable homes, surrounded by safe and thriving communities.”

- 3.2 The Council's housing responsibilities and functions are broad. They are both statutory and non-statutory. They contribute to delivery across the Corporate Plan from: enabling people to live independently and in their homes for longer; to ensure homes are more energy efficient and less reliant on non-renewable resources; and to, improving the choice and quality of homes on offer in our town centres, to support their regeneration as sustainable places to live.
- 3.3 The 2021 Census counted 55,951 households in Halton and the latest Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) has 59,206 residential properties listed. The Boroughs Delivery and Allocation Local Plan (DALP), adopted in 2022, seeks development of at least 8,050 (net) additional homes between 2014 to 2037. The DALP also incorporates the policies in respect of affordable and specialist housing requirements. A new Housing Strategy will provide the strategic policy context to coordinate activity and interventions by the Council and our partners to realise the Corporate Plan and the DALP across existing stock and delivery of new homes.
- 3.4 The current Borough wide Housing Strategy was adopted in 2013, at a time of declining public sector resources and was realistic in its scope and ambition. In recent years, there has been more national attention to housing issues including affordability, scale and pace of building new homes and quality of existing stock. With this attention has come new funding opportunities at both a national and devolved Combined Authority level. Demonstrating an up-to-date Housing Strategy is important evidence to support funding bids by ourselves and our partners, such as Registered Providers.
- 3.5 The Council does not currently have a dedicated strategic housing function within the organisation. Statutory housing responsibilities and functions are delivered across a number of Council directorates and services areas. The organisational housing policy framework is summarised below:



- 3.6 To guide the commissioning, production and consultation of the Housing Strategy an internal officer working group was formed in 2023, from across

these service areas. This is complemented by an external Halton Housing Partnership (HHP). The HHP is an interface between the Council and main Registered Providers in Halton. The corporate lead for the HHP is the Executive Director Environment & Regeneration. Registered Providers are supportive of the production of a new Housing Strategy and evidence base. It will help inform and shape their provision within the Borough and how they work with the Council to commission and meet specialist housing needs.

3.7 The key early messages from the officer working group and HHP are set out at Appendix A. These messages form the basis for commissioning production of a new Housing Strategy.

3.8 Production of a Housing Strategy is a specialist task and required to be commissioned externally. A 12 month production period is anticipated, allowing for stakeholder engagement and community consultation. Stakeholder engagement will include a dedicated session with Elected Members, and presentations to relevant Policy and Performance Boards prior to public consultation.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Whilst production of a local (Borough wide) housing strategy is no longer a statutory requirement, most local authorities still provide one. It is recognised that by having an up-to-date strategic policy framework for housing will improve and coordinate the delivery of statutory and non-statutory housing responsibilities and functions by the Council and local partners. Helping to ensure the Council remains responsive to community needs.

4.2 The Borough's previous Housing Strategy, was adopted in 2013 and covered a period up to 2018. It is in need of comprehensive review and replacement. Production of new Strategy requires the identification, gathering and analysis of any supporting evidence base gaps, this will include an up-to-date Housing Needs Assessment.

4.3 This process is anticipated to streamline the current housing policy framework, by incorporating and replacing older 'stand-alone' policies such as the Affordable Warmth Strategy with the Housing Strategy. It may also direct changes to specific Council housing policies, such as the Homes Assistance Policy.

4.4 A 5 – 10 year action plan will accompany the Strategy to ensure effective implementation.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Commissioning external production of the Housing Strategy and evidence base will be met from existing budgets. Cost will be minimised through collation of existing evidence base, to be provided upon appointment. This will reduce duplication and help target resources at filling data gaps.

- 5.2 The intended outcome is to have a net positive impact on the Council's financial position.
- 5.3 Production has been aligned to support implementation of the 'Reimagine Halton' transformation programme, which includes a number of project strands with a strong housing dimension:
- Enabling greater independence and flexibility for adults;
 - Maximising digital technology innovations across Adult Social Care;
 - An ambition to accelerate growth within the Borough.
- 5.4 This could include recommendations for:
- Building organisational capacity and structuring to provide a focus for the strategic housing functions within the Council;
 - Wider borough governance arrangements to foster strategic housing partnerships to co-fund and co-manage delivery;
 - Maximising external funding opportunities; and
 - Utilising redundant Council owned land to meet local housing need.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

Adequate and safe housing provides the security to enable children, young people and families to thrive. The Housing Strategy will support achieving this.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

The choice, quality and affordability of the Borough's housing offer is a foundation stone for a strong and sustainable local economy. The Housing Strategy will support this.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Housing standards and conditions is recognised as a wider determinant of Health and wellbeing outcomes of people. The Housing Strategy will seek better integration of health and housing policy and provision.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Provision of affordable and specialist housing is important to supporting individuals and communities who are most vulnerable. The Housing Strategy will ensure the Council and partners are more responsive to community needs.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Utilising vacant brownfield sites to deliver more homes and support regeneration will be supported through the Housing Strategy.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There are no significant risks associated with the production of a new Housing Strategy.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are none.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Heating and energy use in homes accounts for approximately 15% of carbon emissions within the UK. The Housing Strategy will seek to support delivery of the housing matters set out within the Climate Change Action Plan. This will include updating policy in respect of de-carbonising existing homes in Halton. The Strategy will also support a housing offer which gives residents choice to live more environmentally friendly and sustainable lives. For example through opportunities to improve the choice and quality of housing offer within Borough's town centres.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
A Housing Strategy for Halton (2013 – 2018)	Council Website	Nathan Renison, Regeneration Team

Appendix A – key early messages identified by the HSWG and HHP

The HSWG and HHP have identified three areas of focus for production of a housing strategy:

1. Information & Data, Key Gaps
2. Strategic Themes
3. Delivery & Partnership Working

These areas have been identified to not only aid housing policy development but also to ensure effective implementation and delivery of the Housing Strategy upon adoption.

These are summarised below:

1. Information & Data, Key Gaps

“Evidenced base is critical to support policy implementation, justify interventions and funding bids”

- Up to date information on people's housing needs:
 - Better understanding of demand v supply i.e. Size of dwellings, No. of beds
 - Specialist housing and client groups, identifying trends and predicating future needs
 - Locational trends i.e. where to provide extra care / older people accommodation[Achieved through advanced production of Borough wide Housing Needs Assessment]
- Detailed information on condition of housing stock:
 - General housing condition, targeted at areas / tenures
 - Stock coming to end of life, i.e. some former new town construction types
 - No. of accessible and adapted homes
 - Energy performance and warmth
- Better mapping of providers:
 - Location of affordable housing and specialist provision
 - Details / register of private landlords
 - Access to Local Letting Policies to promote consistency

2. Strategic Themes

“Residents able to access housing that meets their needs, throughout their life”

- Maximising delivery of affordable and specialist housing.
- Improve quality and standards of existing stock, particularly private rented sector.
- Enabling greater independence and flexibility for adults through promoting choice and enabling people to remain within their own home.

- Relationship to health outcomes, empowering communities, inclusivity and life chances – People.
- Improve the energy efficiency of new and existing homes, to make them warmer, reduce heating costs and contribute to Borough's Climate Change Action Plan.
- More than just homes, also decent neighbourhoods and access to amenities .
- Making most of Borough's wasted resources i.e. empty homes, vacant brownfield land.
- Locational priorities, i.e. neighborhood renewal and town centres.
- Need for innovation and learning from best practice (i.e. use of digital technology to enable people to live independently)
- The prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Bespoke and specialist provision, including but not limited to: care leavers and those at risk of domestic abuse.
- Delivering and accelerating sustainable housing growth to support economic development, attracting, and retaining employees/ residents.

3. Delivery & Partnership Working

“Create a housing policy framework to achieve more joined up coordination and delivery within the Council and with partners”

- Promote good partnership working centered on empowering residents to achieve better outcomes.
- Need for improved communication and transparency between housing sector stakeholders in Halton:
 - Understand each others priorities better
 - Collaborate on capital and external funding opportunities
 - Competing priorities for housing – agree approach to sourcing properties to ensure equity for all client groups
 - Co-ordinated response to shared challenges
- Strategic planning - establish processes to bring Council Commissioning into early discussions when looking at new developments:
 - Opportunities to include supported accommodation and services, are being developed in partnership
 - Ensure housing providers / developers can evidence demand for services (supported accommodation, residential care)
 - Inclusion of specific household needs / requirements for adapted housing, down to an individual family needs
- Delivery of Housing Strategy will require housing provider 'Buy In':
 - Changes to Adult Social Care Services (Reimagine Halton Transformation Programme)