

Housing Strategy 2020-25

Adopted June 2020

Index

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

CHAPTER 2: Increasing Housing Supply

CHAPTER 3: Improving Housing Quality

CHAPTER 4: Providing housing advice and support for individuals and communities

CHAPTER 5: Performance

Appendices:

Appendix 1: A bit About Wealden – background statistics

Appendix 2: What have we achieved since our last Housing Strategy published in 2016?

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Strategic Vision

The Council's Corporate Plan 2019-23 sets out the Council's plan to continue to work with our partners to support Wealden's communities, environment and economy with:

- Engaged, resilient, active communities
- Access to suitable housing, local jobs, services, facilities, leisure and recreational opportunities
- Sustainable economic growth
- Sound business management

The Council's priorities for Wealden over 2019-23 cover four themes:

- Communities
- Environment
- Local Economy
- Sound Business Management.

Housing falls within the communities theme which provides that:

We want people in Wealden's communities to have the opportunity to enjoy an excellent quality of life. This will be achieved by:

- Meeting local needs in our housing market particularly for first time buyers and older people seeking to downsize
- Building and maintaining more council homes to a high standard, and help people who are, or are likely to become homeless
- Supporting partner organisations to provide more affordable homes for residents who cannot access home ownership

In keeping with the corporate priorities this Housing Strategy contributes to more than just housing. It incorporates aims to:

- Promote a better quality of life for Wealden people through activities that improve health, resilience and well-being
- Ensure development meets future needs, with associated investment in infrastructure

We will continue to do this by:

- Increasing housing supply
- Improving housing quality.
- Providing housing advice and support for individuals and communities.

Our strategic objectives continue to be underpinned by a set of key principles:

- **Reducing inequality** - making sure that services are welcoming and responsive to the needs of Wealden's whole community.
- **Improving neighbourhoods** - making sure services contribute to creating safe sustainable communities.

- **Accountability to local people** - making sure that local people are involved in decisions about the services that affect them.
- **Value for money** - making sure services are good quality and provide excellent value for money.
- **Partnership working** - making sure the Council works with other agencies that can help improve the quality of life residents in the District.

Background

Our Housing Strategy incorporates the Private Housing Renewal Strategy. Between the last strategy published in 2016 and this update the housing sector continues to experience change and face further challenges. There have been national and local policy changes including the decision to leave Europe, Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, Homes, Fitness for Human Habitation Act 2018 and Tenant Fees Act 2019.

The Welfare Reform Act continues to impact on Wealden residents particularly with regards to Universal Credit which is continuing to be rolled out.

The decision to leave Europe is creating uncertainty in the absence of a withdrawal agreement particularly around the availability and cost of services and goods.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 creates two additional duties on local authorities, in addition to the duty to rehouse: a duty to relieve and a duty to prevent homelessness. It creates a responsibility to work with households that are threatened with homelessness within 56 days (an increase from 28 days) and to prepare Personalised Action Plans. All of these changes have created an increase in the workload of the Council's Housing Options Team.

Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation Act 2018) came into force on 20 March 2019. The aim of the Act is to help drive up standards in rented homes in both the affordable and private sectors and provide an alternative means for tenants to seek redress from their landlord if their rented property presents a risk of harm to the health and safety of the occupiers.

Tenant Fees Act 2019 came into force on 1 June 2019 resulting in landlords or agents no longer being able to require tenants in the private rented sector in England to make certain payments in connection with a tenancy.

The Government remain committed to increasing housing supply nationally and unlocking stalled sites, as well as increasing homeownership.

In developing this strategy we have consulted to ensure we have developed a strategy with the correct priorities and underlying principles. Furthermore that our actions for achieving these priorities are the correct ones.

CHAPTER 2: Increasing Housing Supply

Key Issues and Evidence

- We need to build more homes in the district to meet demand – The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms that Council's should apply the 'standard methodology' in order to assess their housing requirement on a yearly basis, unless other robust evidence suggests that an alternative approach should be used. For Wealden District Council, using the 'standard methodology', the Council will have a requirement to build at least 1,231 (net) dwellings per annum at this stage¹.
- We need to increase the supply of smaller private properties across all tenures. Only 7.6% of Wealden's stock is 1 bedrooms and 28% 2 bedrooms², however 27.6% of our households are single person households.³. Additionally, within the affordable sector there is a high demand for smaller properties particularly 1 bedroom's with 47% of households registered for affordable housing requiring 1 bedroom properties and a further 28% 2 bedroom properties.⁴
- We need to increase the supply of affordable housing to meet need. Many households in Wealden are unable to afford to buy a property due to affordability issues. Using median house prices to median gross annual workplace based earnings someone would need to borrow 11.55 times their income to be able to buy a property.⁵
For many, other options are limited since shared ownership remains in short supply (see below) as does private rented accommodation (see below). Notwithstanding supply issues, private rented accommodation is not affordable for many households due to the Local Housing Allowance which is based on lower quartile rents.
- We need to increase the supply of properties available for private rent. Although Wealden has seen a substantial increase in the supply of private rented accommodation between the 2001 and 2011 Census it still only makes up 11.1% of the stock compared to a national profile of 16.7% and East Sussex profile of 17.8%⁶. Given the cost of purchasing a property, the shortage of private rented properties to help those approaching the council for housing advice or because they are threatened with homelessness is a really important resource for the district.
- We need to address the shortage of shared accommodation options. Due to the profile of our housing stock (family homes and few large Victorian properties which are traditionally converted to flats or shared accommodation) we have a very short supply of shared accommodation, representing just 0.02% of all stock in the district, compared to a national profile of 0.9%. Both the South East figures and the East Sussex figures also very low at 0.07% and 0.1% respectively. This means there are limited options for those needing shared accommodation both within the district and also in surrounding areas. For some people shared accommodation is the only affordable option and for

¹ The full calculation is provided within the Council's [Authority Monitoring Report 2018/19](#) under section 5.

² 2011 Census

³ 2011 Census

⁴ Locata – Housing Register database as at 30 September 2019.

⁵ 2019 data from

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/ratioofhousepricetoworkplacebasedearningslowerquartileandmedian>

⁶ 2011 Census

under 35's claiming Housing Benefit they are only entitled to assistance based on the cost of a room in shared accommodation.⁷

- We need to increase the availability of shared ownership. The profile of shared ownership is the same in Wealden as the national profile at 0.8%⁸. However, in a climate where people are unable to access full homeownership due to affordability issues but desire to do so there is a need to increase the supply to meet this need.
- We need to increase the supply of specialist/adaptable/supported housing. We need to plan for new housing that meets the needs of our ageing population and is adaptable for people that may have physical disability/mobility problems or learning disabilities. The Office of National Statistics has estimated that Wealden's population will continue to grow, reaching 190,657 by 2041. If the projections are correct those aged 65+ will make up 34.6% of Wealden's population by 2041⁹. Additionally, it is predicted that the number of people with a disability in Wealden will increase from 25,676 in 2018 to 36,531 in 2032. We also need to explore the provision of specialist supported accommodation for homeless households as it is becoming increasingly difficult to find accommodation particularly for complex single homeless people. This as a result of their high support needs due to issues such as mental health, drug and alcohol and without supported accommodation will not be able to sustain a tenancy and address their challenges.¹⁰

What are we doing to address these issues?

Building more homes

- Develop and adopt a sound and legally compliant Local Plan
- The Council have set up Sussex Weald Homes a wholly Council-owned company, to build a range of homes to target the first-time buyer and those who want to down-size.
- Develop a process of proactive engagement and cooperation with developers to increase housing delivery in the district
- Work with partner organisations to ensure local infrastructure improvements are forthcoming when need to support new development

Increasing the supply of smaller homes

- In terms of housing mix, the current Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) published in August 2016, suggests that new housing development in the district, including affordable housing will need to provide for a mix of

⁷ In addition, the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2016 highlighted a substantial need for another youth foyer in the district.

⁸ 2011 Census

⁹ Source: East Sussex in Figures

¹⁰ For more information on Homelessness look at our Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023

dwelling size and type that meets the identified housing needs of the local area. The evidence suggests that a higher proportion of smaller homes will be required within the district for the future.

- The Council's current Development Plan requires that at least 35% of the number of dwellings on new development sites be affordable subject to the size of the site. Where it is being provided by the Council we will ensure a large proportion of this is one and two bedroom properties.

Increasing the supply of affordable housing

- The Council's current Development Plan sets out that affordable housing is required at a level of 35% of the number of dwellings on new development sites, above a site size threshold. All major development sites (of 10 dwellings or above) are required by national planning policy to provide affordable housing.
- Building and purchasing new Council homes, using Housing Revenue. If the new affordable homes are grant funded the rent has to be set at affordable rent levels rather than social rents which many households cannot afford. The result is also very few homes at the lower social rented level.

Increasing the supply of private rented properties

- It is hoped that through our work in supporting and advising private landlords and letting agents the quality of private housing will improve, so will our relationships which will mean that they want to increase their portfolio of private rented properties in the district.
- This is an area that the Council has never sought to intervene in to date. However, in order to increase supply now and in the long-term we need to look at what we can do as a Council to either directly supply properties for private rent or to encourage institutional investment into the district.

Addressing the need for more shared accommodation

- We continue to explore options to provide shared accommodation for those requiring affordable housing in partnership with a housing association.
- We continue to work with landlords who are looking to provide Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's) to provide help and advice on licensing.
- We need to do more work in exploring how we can encourage and support the provision of shared accommodation in the district.

Increasing the supply of shared ownership

- The Council's current Development Plan makes an allowance for that fact that around 20% of the affordable housing quota will be intermediate accommodation. In this context intermediate accommodation will primarily be shared ownership.
- Although not traditional shared ownership, we actively promote other schemes to help our resident's access homeownership. These include initiatives such as Help to Buy, Equity Loan and Help to Buy ISA.

We need to increase the supply of specialist/adaptable/supported housing

- The Council, as part of its new Local Plan, will undertake work on its evidence base to consider whether on larger development sites a percentage of

dwellings can be accessible and adaptable including a provision for wheelchair accessible properties.

- We continue to work closely with East Sussex County to explore the need for and develop any specialist accommodation.
- We are working with East Sussex County Council to review the current supply of supported accommodation across East Sussex.
- We are exploring options to provide emergency accommodation within the district, particularly for families.
- We ensure all vacant adapted affordable housing is advertised accordingly so those adaptations can be utilised by another household needing them.
- We continue to employ 2 part-time Housing Solutions Workers to ensure residents have assistance and support to access long term housing solutions that meet their needs.
- We continue to provide means tested Disabled Facilities Grants, regardless of tenure, to those requiring adaptations to their property to make it suitable for their needs. We also have an in-house Occupational Therapist and Assistant Occupational Therapist to undertake these assessments.

CHAPTER 3: Improving Housing Quality

The Council aims to ensure that all properties in the district regardless of tenure or type (including mobile homes) are decent, safe, warm, secure and healthy. Ensuring

residents are able to live in decent homes that are suitable for their needs enhances quality of life.

Good quality housing has an impact on health and wellbeing, including increased life expectancy. Conversely poor housing has knock on effects in terms of crime, education and health. It is therefore essential that we take action to ensure our residents live in good quality homes.

Homes in the district are generally in good condition and we have seen a dramatic improvement in the standard of homes of across all sectors. Legislative changes have also helped to drive up standards:

- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 came into force on 20 March 2019. It amends the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 to require that residential rented accommodation is provided and maintained in a state of fitness for human habitation; and for connected purposes.

Additionally the Housing and Planning Act 2016 set out a number of changes:

- Introduction of a database of rogue landlords and property agents which came into force on 6th April 2018, on which only local authorities can make an entry subject to meeting qualifying criteria.
- On the 1st October 2018 the mandatory licensing requirement was extended to include smaller properties used as HMOs.
- On the 6 April 2017 provisions under The Housing and Planning Act 2016 came into force giving the local housing authority the power to issue a financial penalty notice for certain Housing Act 2004 offences as an alternative to prosecution.
- From the 1st April 2018 any properties rented out in the private rented sector must have an Energy Performance Certificate rated at least band E. The regulations came into force for new lets and renewals from April 2018 and will come into force for all existing tenancies from April 2020. There are some exemptions.

Key Issues and Evidence

- Identifying landlords and educating them to ensure they meet their legal obligations as a landlord. We try to strike a balance between taking enforcement action where necessary and working with landlords to address issues over the quality of the accommodation that they let. Some landlords are “accidental landlords” having inherited a property which they now let out and as such are not aware of their obligations when letting out a property.
- In helping to improve the quality of all housing in the district we need to explore options that are carbon neutral, to allow us to achieve a net-zero CO2 by 2050
- Educating tenants on lifestyles choices. Reports of damp and/or mould across all rented sectors continues to be one of the main issue raised with regards to quality that tenants approach us about. It is usually not damp but condensation caused by the lifestyles that people lead. We need to continue to try and educate people.

- Supporting home owners to take out loans to improve their properties. We are no longer financially able to provide grant funding to help improve properties in the private sector and have to rely on loans. However, we empower home owners to access assistance through a socially responsible third party loan provider to improve and maintain their homes. We also have a Private Housing Assistance Policy.
- Work to improve the quality of new build properties. Nationally the quality of some new homes has become a problem and as a result the Government announced the intention to create a New Homes Ombudsman to support homebuyers facing problems with their newly built home. They also plan to legislate to require all new developers to belong to a new homes ombudsman. There are also plans for changes to building regulations for new dwellings and a Fire safety Bill in currently in progress.

What are we doing to address these issues?

Identifying landlords and educating them to ensure they meet their legal obligations as a landlord.

- We continue to produce a newsletter for landlords which informs them of changing requirements e.g. new legislation or proposed changes and other useful information. This is sent to all landlords on our database and made available to others via our website. Whenever, we come across a new landlord we ask them if we can include them on our database so they can receive updates.
- Ensuring we keep our website up to date with relevant information.
- Advice is given to all landlords when we have contact with them regarding a properties condition.

In helping to improve the quality of all housing in the district we need to explore options that are carbon neutral, to allow us to achieve a net-zero CO2 by 2050

- In 2020/21 an action plan for the Council's own housing stock will be published, setting out how we plan to make our properties more energy efficient.
- A housing carbon management plan will also be developed in due course, for new build homes and existing non-council properties. The aim being to investigate non-gas fuel options and promoting these, supporting uptake of initiatives such as PV, creating/promoting guidance on low carbon heating systems etc.

Educating tenants on lifestyles choices

- We respond to all property complaints. Where there are issues with the property we will work with the landlord to remedy these, taking action where necessary. We have a clear process for dealing with reports of damp and mould in council owned stock.
- Providing information for council tenants on what condensation is and how to reduce/prevent it through publications e.g. newsletters and the new tenant's handbook, as well as on our website.

- Advice to any tenants/household who contact us, as well as information on our website.
- Sometimes it is a result of lack of heating which can be caused by households not being able to afford to heat their home. In addition to the above events such as pop up energy shops and initiatives such as the Big Switch, Warm Homes are held to try and provide advice on reducing energy costs. Bespoke advice to any residents.

Supporting home owners to take out loans to improve their properties

- When a homeowner or someone acting on behalf of the home owner contacts us we will explain how the loans work and the benefits of going through our socially responsible third party loan provider. The provider offers a number of products to suit the applicant's circumstances.
- We provide information on our website.

Work to improve the quality of new build properties

- Respond to relevant Government consultations.
- Continue to lobby central government about the 'race to the bottom'¹¹ by ensuring that whilst competition exists within the building control market place it's on the understanding that although we charge for the service, we still need to be able to take necessary enforcement action against paying for these services.
- We will always try to work with developers to ensure compliance, but this isn't always possible for many reasons for example build quality is subjective.

CHAPTER 4: Providing housing advice and support for individuals and communities

Key issues and evidence with regards to providing housing advice:

¹¹ Dame Judith Hackitt in her review of Greenfell Tower said existing building regulations have created a "race to the bottom". "The primary motivation is to do things as quickly and cheaply as possible, rather than to deliver quality homes which are safe for people to live in,"

The Council continues to provide housing advice to all households regarding accessing affordable housing, renting privately and home ownership options.

There are a number of challenges when providing housing advice to individuals (see Chapter 3) and include:

- Shortage of affordable housing in the district.
- A shortage of smaller accommodation i.e. one and two bedroom properties in both the affordable and private rented sector.
- Accessing accommodation for people under 35 due to the lack of shared accommodation in the District.
- Shortage of private rented accommodation in the district.
- Affordability of private rented accommodation due to the fact that the Local Housing Allowance rates for those claiming financial support with their rent are based on lower quartile prices and were frozen at the 2016 levels until April 2020, despite annual increases in rental cost.
- Limited availability of shared ownership stock.
- There is a lack of specialist housing.

In addition

- Issues of accessibility for those moving seeking private rented accommodation and who do not have a guarantor. – Guarantors are expected in the majority of private lettings in order to protect the landlord in the event of a rent default. This is expected in addition to a cash deposit. A guarantor is usually someone who is a home owner or in full time employment earning a high annual salary and must be willing to guarantee the tenant's rent payment in the event of default. The majority of applicants approaching the Council for housing assistance cannot provide a guarantor.
- Affordability and accessing housing association homes. Housing association are now carrying out their own pre-tenancy checks including affordability checks once we have nominated a suitable housing applicant to them for a vacant property. Despite our checks some **housing applicants** have been declined applicants on the basis of affordability which leaves the applicant with limited options except council housing.
- We need to be in a position to respond more quickly in the market to avoid missing opportunities. We need to develop a process and procedure so that we can work with a landlord to let their property to a households from our housing register. This includes building intelligence and recording information on what clients' need so private rented properties can be quickly let.

What are we doing to address these issues?

Issues of accessibility for those moving seeking private rented accommodation and who do not have a guarantor

- A successful County-wide bid to MHCLG to the Private Rented Sector Access Fund, resulted in grant funding of £74,000 for 2019/20 being awarded to the five District and Boroughs, ring fenced for rent guarantor assistance.

Wealden's £14k share of the funding is being used to revise the existing deposit guarantee scheme to provide the rent guarantor service while we have this funding available.

Affordability and accessing housing association homes

- It is a difficult challenge to tackle due to the lack of control that we have. However, we are working with housing associations at the development stage to influence nominations agreements.

We need to be in a position to respond more quickly in the market to avoid missing opportunities

- We are working with private landlords to obtain access to these properties for those households who are in housing need.
- We are using intelligence on customers to ensure vacancies in the private rented sector are filled quickly and by suitable applicants.

Key issues and evidence with regards to providing support for individuals and communities:

Housing Related Support

- Shortage of housing related support. Housing related support has been primarily funded by East Sussex County Council through their floating support contract. However, the extent of the support services have been reduced in recent years due to funding cuts and now is focused primarily on helping people who are at risk of homeless/homeless and have high needs and/or are complex. A further review of the services commenced in 2019 and is still ongoing.
- Due to the reduced floating support available tenancy sustainment has become an issue and we have had to explore other ways to meet customer's needs. This includes employing a Tenancy Sustainment Officer to work with private landlords and tenants. Our Tenancy Sustainment Officer will work with both parties to explore the options to resolve the issue/s being experienced and to prevent homelessness. The issues they can help with are wide ranging and include rent arrears, support needs, antisocial behaviour. Due to the economic climate other services including charitable services have seen an increase in demand. Citizens Advice have seen a rise in customers from 4,520 in 16/17 to 4,907 in 2018/19. They continue to provide vital services for our residents helping with a range of issues from benefits and tax credits, to debt and family and relationship issues.
- The role out of Universal Credit causes concern over people's ability to budget and ensure that their rent is paid. Since its original pilot evidence has suggested that rent arrears increase for those on universal credit for a number of reasons. These include delays in processing claims, the fact that it is paid a month in arrears, the rent element isn't paid direct to the landlord and that households will get a single monthly payment which means they must budget to meet all their monthly outgoings. The average arrear of a council tenant in Wealden on universal credit is 12 and a half times more than a tenant on Housing benefit.

- Assisting rough sleepers. Although the numbers of rough sleepers is very low in Wealden, due to its rural nature they are more visible. Despite being successful in obtaining funding for initiatives to tackle and support rough sleeping funding is always time limited which affects our ability to support vulnerable members of our community and to recruit and retain staff.
- There is limited funding for specialist accommodation. Specialist accommodation is more expensive to build than general needs housing and the higher capital cost make it difficult to make a scheme financially viable due to limited grant funding. Additionally, such schemes require high revenue funding which can be outside the remit of Housing Benefit, and so are only viable if funding is available from statutory services such as Adult Social Care.

Support for individuals and Communities (non-housing)

- Ensuring our residents are able to access services, including advice.
- In a large rural area like Wealden it is essential that we raise awareness and promote take-up of the services available.
- In order to ensure value for money it is essential that we work in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations to deliver local services.
- Providing funding for services and projects.

What are we doing to address these issues?

Housing related support

Shortage of housing related support

- Employing a tenancy Sustainment Officer to help both private landlords and tenants to sustain tenancies in the private rented sector by trying to resolve any issues including rent arrears, support needs, antisocial behaviour to prevent homelessness occurring.
- Exploring the possibility of providing a Sustainment Officer to help council tenants to sustain their tenancy.
- Working with East Sussex County Council to highlight the lack of support in the district.
- Bidding for funding to support households with successful bids to support rough sleepers.

Due to the economic climate other services including charitable services have seen as increase in demand

What are we doing to help charities to remain viable?

- Continuing to fund services such as Citizens Advice through a Service Level Agreement
- Funding other charities who provide vital services through our Corporate Grants Programme.
- Helping charities and community organisations identify and bid for funding through our Tenant Involvement Team and Grants Officer.

The role out of Universal Credit causes concern over people's ability to budget and ensure that their rent is paid

What are we doing to support residents with budgeting and paying their rent?

- Pre-tenancy training for housing applicants before they can access affordable housing.
- Employment of a Tenancy Support Office in the housing income team to help tenants experiencing problems paying their rent.
- Employment of a Tenancy Sustainment Officer to help tenants in the private rented sector sustain their tenancy.
- Free Street Learning courses for all residents, which has included budgeting courses.
- Work to support tenant's access advice including Service Level Agreement and funding to Citizens Advice and outreach JobCentre Plus services in the district.
- Supporting Citizens Advice through and SLA who provide a money advice service that can help around 200 Wealden residents per annum on a one to one basis

Assisting rough sleepers

- Bidding for funding, with two recent successful bids in East Sussex to:
A) Target those sleeping rough with higher support needs, through providing intensive outreach support to get them to engage, then into emergency accommodation and resettlement into longer term accommodation.
B) To deliver support to access accommodation and tenancy sustainment to clients with low to medium support needs, who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping, with Home works delivering the service.

There is limited funding for specialist accommodation

- We are working with East Sussex County Council to identify any gaps in provision and to recycle any money obtained by selling or decommissioning current residential properties and to bid for suitable funding to deliver what is needed. This usually involves working with a housing association to own and manage the accommodation.

Ensuring our residents are able to access services, including advice:

- The Council continue to employ a range of officers who work closely together to support our local communities they include Tenant Involvement Team, Housing Officers, Private Housing Officers, Benefit Officers, Housing Estate Wardens, Public Health and Community Officers, Council Tax Officers and the Bailiffs. These officers spend much of their time providing advice and assistance and sign-posting to help benefit both individuals and communities.
- Ensuring a variety of ways to access services e.g. online, over the telephone and face to face.
- Promotion of services so that residents are aware that they exist (see below).

Support for individuals and Communities (non-housing)

In a large rural area like Wealden it is essential that we raise awareness and promote take-up of the services available.

- It is essential that we promote all the services that we provide and work with partners to raise awareness and sign-post our residents and communities to them. This is done through Officers out in the community or at meetings, on

our website, press releases, social media, hard copies e.g. leaflets as appropriate.

In order to ensure value for money it is essential that we work in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations to deliver local services.

- The Council works in partnership with many other organisations both statutory and voluntary to ensure services and advice are available to residents and that they can access them. This includes partnership projects, pooling resources, bidding for funding and providing outreach services. Projects include DWP outreach service for universal credit claimants, People Matter employment advice outreach, and free courses via Street Learning for residents, IT training and support in partnership with the library service and much more.

Providing funding for services and projects

- Continuing to fund a grants programme for Service Level Agreements and for capital grants and small grants to support vital service provision and to fund a range of projects across the district. In 2019/20 the Council funded £271,000 for Service Level Agreements, £50,000 for capital projects and £20,000 small grants

CHAPTER 5: Performance

In setting out the Council's key priorities for this Housing Strategy we have used a wide range of data from many sources. The Strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis and updated again in 2024/25 to ensure that it is in line with the Corporate Plan priorities.

The Housing Strategy will be monitored through the council's Housing Service Plan to ensure the four key priorities continue to be delivered. Individual staff will be responsible for these in their annual appraisals. We will continue to report back on performance to Council's tenants and leaseholders via our Threshold magazine and our annual report. We will report back to other stakeholders via meetings such as the East Sussex Housing Officers Group and other sub-groups and to councillors through quarterly performance reports and Members Bulletins.

Appendix 1: A bit About Wealden – Background statistics

- Wealden lies within East Sussex which consists of 5 districts and boroughs with Wealden being the largest covering 323 square miles.
- Half of Wealden's population live in the five main towns of Polegate, Hailsham, Heathfield, Uckfield and Crowborough. With the remaining population live in the 37 smaller and more rural parishes in Wealden.
- The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the South Downs National Park together cover some 60% of the District. The Ashdown Forest is

also designated as a Special Protection Area, Special Area of Protection and Site of Special Scientific Interest.

- There are 41 Conservation Areas within Wealden District, but 8 of these are located within and managed by the South Downs National Park Authority.
- Wealden has more than 2,000 listed buildings.
- The largest contributor to Wealden's economy is tourism.
- Economic development is predominantly across the coastal strip.
- Wealden has a poorly developed infrastructure and environmental constraints which affect the development of housing and business.
- Wealden has the lowest crime rate in East Sussex and one of the lowest crime rates of anywhere in the UK.
- Wealden continues to be the least deprived district in East Sussex. Only three Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) within Wealden fall into the most deprived 20% in England and all three are in Hailsham. The most deprived LSOA is in Hailsham South and West, and the other two are in Hailsham East.
- Wealden has a very small proportion of BME non-white groups within the population (2.6%). The Asian/Asian British population makes up 1.2%, mixed raced 1%, black or black British or other ethnic group at 0.2% each.
- Migration into and out of Wealden remains fairly balanced with 9,230 moves into the district in 2017 and 8,354 moves out. The most active group is those aged 25-44 followed by 45-64 with more people in these age groups moving into Wealden than out, whereas 15-24 are more likely to move out of Wealden.
- Figures at 2018 showed that 80.9% of Wealden residents were economically active of which 78.4% were employment of these 18.9% were self-employed. Of the 19.1% economically active residents 84.8% did not want a job.
- 2011 Census show that of those residents who were economically active (in employment) in 2011, 42% (21,579) worked within the local authority area. A further 13% (6,556) of residents worked in neighbouring Eastbourne, 8% (4,119) worked in Tunbridge Wells, 6% (3,145) worked in Lewes, 5% (2,375) worked in Mid Sussex, 3% (1,381) worked in Rother, and the remaining 24% worked elsewhere.
- The JSA claimant rate in Wealden remains consistently low at stood at just 1.5% of the population being in receipt of it at February 2019 compared to a national figure of 3.1% and an East Sussex figure of 3%.
- The median weekly income of Wealden residents at £449 per week is higher than that of Wealden employees at £383 per week due to high levels of commuting out of the District.
- According to the 2011 Census, Wealden has a population of 148,915 people across 62,676 households. It is estimated that the population stood at 158,941 (2017) and 66,934 households (2016).
- There are a number of data sets for estimating future population growth. Dwelling led projections estimated that the population will grow to 83,252 people by 2032 and trend based projection to 86,554 by 2041.
- Not only does Wealden have an increasing population it also has an aging population. Both sets of projections (see bullet point above) estimate that the largest growth will be in the 85+ age bracket at around a 200% growth over their estimated time frames.

- Men in Wealden have a life expectancy of 81.5 years which is the joint highest in East Sussex with Lewes and higher than the East Sussex figure of 80.2 years and the national figure of 79.6. Women have a life expectancy of 84.6 in Wealden, the second highest in East Sussex behind Lewes at 85 years, but above the East Sussex average of 83.9 years and the national figure of 83.1 years.

Housing in Wealden

- Wealden continues to be the most expensive area in East Sussex with the average property price being £377,858 compared to the East Sussex average of £317,192.
- The need for affordable housing was last calculated as 331 (Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2016). This has likely increased in the interim period and will be considered as part of new Local Plan.
- Based on the 2011 Census, in Wealden 42% of dwelling stock is owner occupied (outright), approximately 37% is owner occupied (with a mortgage or loan), 11% is private rented, 8% is social/affordable rented, 2% are living rent free and 1 % is shared ownership. This shows a decrease in owner occupation and a slight rise in social/affordable rented, the largest rise being in the private rented sector since the previous Census.
- The number of households on the waiting list for housing has dropped to 671 as at March 2019 from 962 in April 2016, this is not because demand has dropped but because the criteria to access housing has been tightened in the Housing Allocations Policy. The greatest demand continues to be for one bedroom properties which accounts for over half those on the register.
- As of 1st April 2019 there were 5,548 social/affordable housing rented properties in Wealden (2943 council and 2605 housing association), of which 29% were 3 bedroom houses, 18% 2 bedroom houses, 17% 1 bedroom flats, 13% 2 bedroom flats and 11% retirement living flats.
- 404 properties became available for letting (including new builds) in 2018-19 of which 229 were council properties and the remaining 175 Private Registered Providers homes (also known as housing Associations).
- During 2018/19 151 households were prevented from becoming homeless (through help to enable them to stay in their current accommodation) and 145 had their homelessness relieved (through assistance to secure alternative accommodation for example through a deposit or guarantee).
- 215 households are affected by the housing benefits under occupancy charge, 165 are under occupying by 1 bedroom and the remaining 50 by 2 or more bedrooms. Of these 107 are council tenants and the remaining 108 housing association tenants. This has fallen from 284 when the last Strategy was written in 2016.
- 66 households are affected by the current Benefit Cap of £20,000. This figure has risen sharply from the 21 cases when the strategy was last updated in 2016. The majority are affected by up to £50 per week. The reason for this increase is that the cap fell from £26,000 to £20,000 per annum in late 2016. Only 8 council tenants are affected by the cap.
- The Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2016 highlighted that Wealden is not a self-contained Housing Market Area (HMA) but rather forms part of a wider housing market which includes Mid Sussex, Tunbridge Wells, Rother,

Hastings, Lewes Eastbourne and Brighton & Hove. This issues will be reconsidered as part of the new Local Plan. The housing market is diverse with four broad rental market areas for Local Housing Allowance rates covering the district.

- The 2011 Census has again highlighted that Wealden has substantially largest proportion of detached stock (45%) compared with the, South East (28%) and England and Wales (23%) comparators. 11.5% of Wealden's stock is flats which is approximately 10% less than the proportion for the other comparator areas. The proportion of semi-detached stock in Wealden is closely comparable to the national level and approximately 3% greater than the proportions for the South East region. Wealden has the lowest proportion of terraced stock (13%), which is 9/11% less than the proportions for the South East and England and Wales.
- Wealden has an extremely low proportion of caravans or other stock types (1.2%) (2011 Census).
- In Wealden, 3 bedroom stock has the highest representation, at 35% of total stock, followed by 2 bed stock at 28% and 4 bed stock at 20%. Only 7.6% of stock has 1 bedroom and 8.4% of the stock has 5 or more bedrooms (2011 Census).
- Most notably, settlements in the north of the District have higher proportions of larger 4 and 5+ bedroom stock (particularly in Crowborough St Johns) and settlements in the south of the District have higher proportions of smaller 2 bedroom stock (particularly Polegate and Hailsham) (2011 Census).
- Properties to buy or rent remain more expensive in north of the district than the than south (SHMA 2016).
- The majority of private renters are aged 25-44 (55.9%, English Housing Survey 2017-8 - EHS), of which 31.5% are aged 25-34 years and 24.4% aged 35 to 44 years.
- The majority (76.4%) of private rented sector accommodation was rented to someone who was in full-time employment (English Housing Survey 17/18).

What do we know about housing quality?

- The quality of the council's housing stock is very good with just 1% failing to meet decent homes standard. All these are as a result of tenant's refusals to allow us to undertake the work necessary to make them decent.
- Stock quality is good within the District. The proportion of households with central heating (a proxy for the availability of modern facilities) is 98% (2011 Census). However, this means that 2% of households in Wealden still do not have central heating.
- 24.5% of homes in the private rented sector are considered to be non-decent (English Housing Survey 17/18).
- 8.4% of all homes have a problem with damp, this rises to 16.2% of private rented homes (English Housing Survey 17/18).
- SAP ratings which show how energy efficient a property is continuing to rise and stands at 60.8 for private rented housing, 60.9 for owner occupied and 69.7 for affordable housing (English Housing Survey 17/18).
- Owner occupiers were more likely to be satisfied with their accommodation (94%) than either affordable renters (81%) or private renters (82%).

Mortgagors were slightly less likely to be satisfied with their accommodation (92%) than outright owners (95%) (English Stock Condition Survey 13/14).

What do we know about the support needs of our residents?

Support needs vary considerably, from advice and information to practical help with daily tasks but we know the following:

- The number of Wealden residents receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment increased from 5,785 in November 2015 to 6,311 in November 2018.
- The census 2011 found that of the 146,039 Wealden residents at the time 16,629 provided unpaid care to someone else.
- POPPI¹² 2015 highlighted that those with learning disability aged 65+ will increase by 41% between 2014 and 2030.
- PANSI¹³ 2015 shows an increase of 2% with moderate physical disabilities and 5% for those with a serious physical disability between 2014 and 2030.

Appendix 2: What have we achieved since our last Housing Strategy published in 2016?

With regards to: Housing Supply:

- 1,960 homes have been built in the district.
- Continued to work closely with planning, developers and housing associations to deliver 346 new affordable homes.
- Built 96 new council homes on HRA owned land, including a new retirement living complex of 67 flats.

¹² Projecting Older People Population Information System

¹³ Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information System

- In addition to the new council homes built on existing sites we have purchased 31 new properties as well as 2 existing properties.
- Regularly reviewed the Council's General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) assets. The HRA assets that are in low demand are decommissioned and either remodelled or new council homes built in their place. This includes the demolition of and new build retirement living scheme at Grants Hill Court, Uckfield. The demolition and new build general needs properties on the former Elizabeth Court site in Hailsham. The refurbishment of Joan Hughes Court in Polegate. Streatfeild House, Uckfield has recently been decommissioned with plans for new council homes on the site in the pipeline.
- We continue to make better use of the stock owned by the Council, this includes:
 - Using Flexible Fixed Term Tenancies to ensure that Council homes are occupied by those that need them
 - Reviewing the Council's Tenant Incentive Scheme in 2018 to provide financial assistance to under occupying households that move to smaller properties.
 - Tackling fraud and continuing to carry out tenancy audit visits to ensure that council homes are occupied by the correct people. Since 2016 35 cases of fraud have been investigated and 5 found to be fraudulent. In these 5 cases action has been taken to get the property back.
- Reviewed our Allocations Policy in 2018 and 2019/20 to ensure that we are able to assist those most in need of affordable housing.
- Reviewed both the Council's Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy in 2017.

With regards to: Housing Quality

- Set-up a fuel voucher scheme to provide one-off heating assistance to those in crisis. These can be obtained from the food banks.
- Dealt with 268 service requests with regard to property conditions.
- Issued 4 licences for Houses in Multiple Occupation falling within the mandatory licensing criteria. With 4 licences pending due to new legislation.
- We completed 6 decent home loans bring our loan capital to £25k.
- Continued to ensure council properties meet the decent homes standard.
- Carried out energy efficiency works to council properties including insulation works to increase insulation levels to 270mm, new boilers, new heating systems, installation of Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) to some properties off the gas network, replaced all remaining single glazed windows.
- Carried out re-roofing and repointing works, replacement doors to council properties, as well as fire safety works.
- Partnership and networking with the other District and Boroughs in East Sussex and East Sussex County Council as part of the ESEP (East Sussex Energy Partnership). This partnership has delivered the Warmer Homes Healthy People project for 6 years across the county.
- Pop Up fuel bill checking events offering advice and bill checking.
- Affiliate partner of the West Sussex County Council Your Energy Sussex (YES) scheme to help residents to create warmer, healthier homes and reduce carbon emissions.

- Continued to raise awareness on energy efficiency through articles in a variety of publications and undertaking talks and presentations to community groups.
- Won Gold Winner for Community Focus (People) award at the Public Sector Transformation award for our work on helping people switch energy supplier through the Big Switch campaign.
- Partnership working with statutory and voluntary groups through the Affordable Warmth Steering Group and the Fuel Poverty Network to disseminate information and advice.
- Undertaken three big switch campaigns securing a total saving of £602,440 to Wealden residents on their fuel bills.
- Undertaken 416 major adaptations to: 169 council properties, 159 owner occupiers, 22 private rented tenants, 65 housing association tenants and 1 to a right to occupy tenant.¹⁴
- The Housing Revenue Account continues to invest up to £250,000 every year in adaptations to council properties. To ensure this money is spent wisely the Housing Solutions Officer and Occupational Therapist helps explore tenants' options before an adaptation is carried out, this may include moving to more suitable accommodation.
- As part of our commitment to improve our stock of Retirement Living Housing we have recently finished decanting residents from Streatfeild House in Uckfield, whilst we look at options for the site which contains a large number of bedsits.
- The Local Development Scheme seeks to ensure renewable energy opportunities are maximised where possible for example through the site layout. It also requires all developments to contribute to the provision of the essential infrastructure and also aims to reduce the need to travel by car.
- Employment of a Housing Solutions Officer to help households needing adaptations to explore their housing options, as well as an in-house Occupational Therapist and assistant to help and assess those with adaptation needs.
- Use relevant national data sources at super output area for targeting purposes, particularly around energy efficiency.

With regards to: Providing housing advice and support for individuals and communities

- Worked in partnership with the other local authorities in East Sussex to run the Syrian Resettlement Program. Helping Syrian families to resettle in Wealden.
- Worked in partnership with the Hastings & Buddy Scheme to provide a structured and supported volunteering arrangement for Syrian families.
- Secured Government funding to support rough sleepers and single homeless at risk of rough sleeping through Rapid Rehousing pathway and Rough Sleepers Initiative for rough sleepers who are complex or have high needs.
- 296 households were assisted to prevent their homelessness in 2018/19.
- Funded a new post to provide private housing tenancy sustainment to help reduce homelessness by supporting households at risk of losing their tenancy.

¹⁴ Up until and including 2018/19

- Worked with East Sussex County to provide financial assistance through Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme to help people access private rented accommodation and buy essential household items.
- Employed an in-house Occupational Therapist and Occupational Therapist assistant to help assess needs and explore residents' options before an adaptation is carried out, this may include moving to more suitable accommodation.
- Continued to fund and work in partnership with Citizens Advice to provide advice to all Wealden residents on a range of topics including debts, and help with Universal Credit applications.
- Worked with JobCentre Plus to provide an outreach service from Crowborough Citizens Advice office and the Council's offices in Hailsham.
- Worked with People Matter to provide an outreach service from the Council's offices.
- In partnership with Eastbourne Borough Council, ACRES, ROVTE, SCDA, East Sussex College, Now Training, JCP and East Sussex County Council Library Service to provide access to free training courses to all Eastbourne and Wealden residents. Including expanding the service in 2019 to include free accredited online courses.
- Continued to run a Wealden Communities grant programme providing support for both revenue and capital projects.
- Continue to support businesses including through newsletters and Business Breakfasts allowing local businesses to access advice and training.
- Running and facilitating events such as an Active Wealden programme which includes Active for Life for older people including dance and yoga sessions. As well as free activity days and active play for children, fun days and fire safety and dementia forums and screenings.
- Set-up Wealden Dementia Action Alliance to raise awareness and support people with dementia living in Wealden.
- Continue to work with the Wealden Disability Group to ensure that people with disabilities are able to access services and receive assistance.
- Supporting numerous events including free blanket testing, Older Persons Day, Get Online week and much more.
- Provided lots of advice and assistance around energy efficiency for all tenures to help communities and individuals particularly with regards to fuel poverty.
- Continued to provide court managers for Council owned retirement living housing.
- Working in partnership with others including other authorities in East Sussex, individual organisations and charities, statutory and voluntary bodies, town and parish councils and partnership groups such as the East Sussex Housing Officers Group to meet the needs of Wealden residents.
- Continue to provide a signposting service to other agencies/services e.g. ensuring residents with support needs are assessed and receive the help and support that they need including any telecare needs via Adult Social Care.
- Reviewed the Letsure Scheme which provides assistance to eligible households to access private rented accommodation.
- Employed a Tenancy Sustainment Officer to work with landlords and tenants to sustain tenancies in the private rented sector.

- Continued to fund a grants programme for Service Level Agreements and for capital grants and small grants to support vital service provision and to fund a range of projects across the district.