

Housing matters:

West Berkshire's Housing Strategy 2020 - 2036

Draft for Consultation



WestBerkshire
COUNCIL

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1 Foreword- why housing matters

To be added following public consultation.

2 Introduction

Housing is more than having a roof over our head or having somewhere to sleep – having a place to truly consider to be ‘home’ plays an essential role in all our lives. Our homes are acknowledged as being key determinants of our health, with poor housing impacting on poor health. The presence of a balanced housing market across West Berkshire is therefore critical to ensuring that residents’ health and well-being is safeguarded and that their housing needs and aspirations are met in respect of the availability, location, size, and affordability of homes across all tenures.

This Housing Strategy sets out West Berkshire Council’s strategic housing priorities and details a range of actions that the Council intends to take in partnership with relevant partners and stakeholders to support residents to access good quality housing while preventing homelessness and rough sleeping.

The strategy sets out the context – both nationally and locally – which, alongside the Council’s strategic vision frame our priorities and the actions and interventions detailed within the delivery plan.



“The presence of a balanced housing market across West Berkshire is critical to ensuring that residents’ health and well-being is safeguarded.”



3 Our District



West Berkshire is a growing district with an estimated population of

157,900

in 2018 expected to grow by 5.4% by 2036.

1,616
older people and
vulnerable adults
accessing long term
support (Mar 2018).



Healthy life expectancy at birth at 70.1 years for females and 66.4 for males are

higher

than the England average (2014-16). Similarly, life expectancy at birth, at 84.5 for females and 81.1 for males is higher than the national average.

13.4%

of housing is owned and managed by housing associations and registered providers – lower than the national average of

17.1%

West Berkshire covers an area of
272 square miles

which is over half of the geographical area of the county of Berkshire. Nearly three quarters of West Berkshire is classified as part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).



In 2018/19 the Council assisted

115 residents

secure a total of £1.1m Disabled Facilities Grant funding for aids and adaptations to live safely in their homes



It is estimated that the residential sector produced

18%

of the total national carbon dioxide emissions in 2018



149 Looked after children and more than

680 children in need supported (Mar 2018), both below England averages (as a rate per 10,000 children).



In August 2019 there were

2,300

households in need of social housing in West Berkshire



The total number of households (in 2018) was

65,000

and this is expected to increase by **10% by 2036**. Households will become smaller, 'one person' and 'couple with no other adults' households are set to increase by 16% each by 2036 whilst others will remain relatively stable.



On average

2,200

households threatened with homelessness contact the Council each year.



Between 2012 and 2017 the level of private renting in West Berkshire reduced by

8%

while nationally it increased by

8%



In November 2019 there were
10 people sleeping rough in West Berkshire

– a reduction from the 20 people sleeping rough in November 2017



In October 2018 there were

232

long term empty homes in West Berkshire

Since 2001 census, an average of

376 new homes

have been built each year.



In West Berkshire the median house price is

9.6

times the median income level (2019)

4 The national context

The Government’s 2017 White Paper – ‘Fixing our Broken Housing Market’¹ – set out the Government’s intention to boost housing supply and create a more efficient housing market over time, but also that the challenge of increasing housing supply could not be met by Government in isolation. The White Paper also acknowledged that in the shorter-term people’s housing needs and aspirations needed to be addressed, including supporting people to buy or rent their own home, preventing homelessness, improving options for older people, and protecting the most vulnerable.

The White Paper also set out the support to enhance the capacity of both local authorities and the industry to build the new homes that each local area needed, with the proviso that partners were required to turn the proposals into reality.

While building more homes is clearly a key contributor to balancing the housing market there are a range of other factors that influence the effectiveness of the market both nationally and locally.

Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping

Homelessness has the potential to touch any household, with a number of common drivers including loss of employment, relationship breakdown, and domestic abuse. In many cases residents threatened with homelessness may not be used to the welfare benefits system, and although vulnerable households are over-represented, the negative perception of homeless households is often unwarranted.

Nationally housing affordability remains a key driver for homelessness, with loss of private rented accommodation consistently one of the top reasons for homelessness across the country, often as a result of rent arrears or an inability to afford a proposed rent increase. And affordability also limits the ability for many households to access home ownership.

Since April 2018, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has resulted in local authorities having additional powers and duties (in accordance with the relevant legislation) to assist residents who are threatened with homelessness, with the primary emphasis placed on the prevention of homelessness.

Homelessness legislation provides a safety net for those households who are impacted by homelessness, and in many cases, councils are obliged to provide temporary accommodation and other assistance until homelessness is relieved. Where the homeless household does not secure accommodation themselves, councils may secure accommodation either in the private rented sector or through ‘affordable housing’ let through a Registered Provider² to end homelessness.

Rough sleeping is often the most visible form of homelessness and regularly impacts on the most vulnerable residents who often have complex needs. Preventing rough sleeping is a key Government priority and in 2018 its Rough Sleeping Strategy was published³. The strategy set out the vision for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending rough sleeping by 2027.

As part of this bold vision the Government have provided funding opportunities for local authorities to reduce rough sleeping through the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) and the Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP).

Enabling the delivery of affordable housing

Social housing, originally provided by local authorities, is now more often delivered by Registered Providers following the transfer of council housing to them through Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (LSVTs). Registered Providers provide both affordable rented and home ownership products designed to assist households who are struggling to access market housing.

The key mechanism for the delivery of affordable homes is through the planning process, where developments of certain sizes are conditional on the delivery of affordable housing as set out in local planning policies.

The definition of affordable housing is provided by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)⁴ and this was updated in 2018 to include a range of alternative products to supplement social rent, affordable rent and shared ownership including starter homes and build to rent.

The Council is currently reviewing its Local Plan that sets out the Council's proposed position on affordable housing for new developments that will be examined by the Planning Inspectorate when the plan is formally submitted in 2022.

Supporting private sector housing

Across the country private housing represents the largest tenure, with 83% of homes privately owned in England and 17% owned by councils, Registered Providers and other public bodies⁵.

Councils currently have a wide range of enforcement interventions to maintain and improve private sector housing standards. These powers are applicable across all tenures, and while most commonly used to improve private rented accommodation, they can also be utilised to improve owner-occupied and Registered Provider homes.

Empty homes are a wasted resource and councils have a range of powers to intervene and return properties back into use, while planning legislation can be used to tackle dilapidated empty homes that impact on the visual amenity of the neighbourhood. However, some empty homes are needed to ensure that the housing market operates as efficiently as possible.

For those living with a disability, housing can have a greater impact on health and wellbeing, for example where access to facilities is difficult or even impossible. The statutory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) regime provides the framework that enables the Council to administer grants for aids and adaptations to help residents remain independent in their own home for longer.



“Across the South East affordability is a critical issue in all segments of the housing market, with people struggling to secure affordable and sustainable housing”

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fixing-our-broken-housing-market>

² Registered Providers are registered and regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing. Registered providers include local authority landlords and private registered providers (such as not-for-profit housing associations and for-profit organisations)

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

⁵ Table 100: number of dwellings by tenure and district, England, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

5 The local Context

This Housing Strategy aims to address the challenges and opportunities that present themselves across West Berkshire, and consequently considering the local context is essential to ensure that our strategic approach is fit for purpose and meets the needs of our residents.

Demographics

West Berkshire has a relatively young population at present however this is expected to change significantly in future years with the population becoming older and household size reducing. This will impact on the future requirements for the type and size of housing.

The demographic change during the life of this strategy (as can be seen in Table 1) will drive an increased focus on housing for older people, residents who need support to live independently, and for those with specialist care needs, as well as smaller homes to accommodate smaller household size.

Table 1 – Projected demographic change across West Berkshire 2020-2036⁶

Age range	Population		% Change
	2020	2036	
0-4	9,023	8,578	-4.9%
5-9	10,226	9,116	-10.9%
10-14	11,065	10,248	-7.4%
15-19	9,071	9,870	8.8%
20-24	6,808	7,310	7.4%
25-29	8,548	8,874	3.8%
30-34	8,906	8,216	-7.7%
35-39	9,793	8,951	-8.6%
40-44	10,407	10,102	-2.9%
45-49	11,833	10,585	-10.5%
50-54	12,489	10,766	-13.8%
55-59	11,754	10,607	-9.8%
60-64	9,910	10,626	7.2%
65-69	8,610	11,125	29.2%
70-74	8,646	10,497	21.4%
75-79	6,156	8,599	39.7%
80-84	4,100	6,518	59.0%
85+	3,846	7,804	102.9%
Total	161,192	168,396	4.5%

As illustrated in Table 1, the population of West Berkshire is projected to grow by less than 5% to 2036. However, of particular importance is the projected increase in older people across West Berkshire, with the cohort of people aged over 85 projected to double in size, while those residents aged over 70 will almost increase by half (46.9%) over the same period.

Housing supply and demand

The Council’s Local Plan⁷ details local planning policies that support development across West Berkshire until 2026, and the Council is currently in the processing of reviewing the Local Plan for the period to 2036⁸.

The current Local Plan details a requirement to deliver 10,500 homes during the 20-year Local Plan period⁹ – a net requirement of 525 new homes each year. It is expected that a similar housing supply requirement will be included in the emerging Local Plan in due course.

The Council’s Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)¹⁰ details the key drivers for the local housing market including housing need. The SHMA also details that in order to meet housing need, new housing developments should provide an affordable housing mix comprising 70% social rented homes and 30% shared ownership homes¹¹.

Across West Berkshire, currently planning policy requires that affordable housing delivered on all sites in excess of five homes with up to 40% of homes required to be provided as affordable housing on large green field sites¹².

The SHMA also sets out the need for affordable homes of different sizes, with an emphasis on the delivery of smaller affordable homes. This aligns with demographic change, however to ensure that smaller homes are fit for the future they should be designed with double bedrooms wherever possible.

Table 2 - Housing tenure bedroom need in West Berkshire¹³

	Bedroom need			
Housing tenure	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
Market housing	5-10%	25-30%	40-45%	20-25%
Affordable housing	30-35%	30-35%	25-30%	5-10%
All dwellings	15%	30%	35%	20%



“the population of West Berkshire is projected to grow by less than 5% to 2036. However, of particular importance is the projected increase in older people across West Berkshire”

⁷ <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/localplan>
⁸ <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/localplanreview2036>
⁹ Core Strategy Planning Policy CS1
¹⁰ <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=40949&p=0>
¹¹ Core Strategy Planning Policy CS6
¹² Core Strategy Planning Policy CS6
¹³ Table 140, SHMA 2016

Given the projected demographic change, and the increase in population of those aged over 70, it is likely that the need for smaller homes will strengthen during the period of this strategy. This is also likely to increase the need for a range of specialist housing solutions to meet the needs of the ageing population.

Delivering affordable housing

West Berkshire Council does not own housing stock that is rented as social housing following the transfer of all Council-owned housing stock in 1989¹⁴ to Sovereign Housing Association¹⁵. This was one of the first large-scale voluntary transfers (LSVTs) and Sovereign now own and manage over 6,500 affordable homes across West Berkshire.

The Council actively works with a number of Registered Providers who operate within West Berkshire to deliver a range of affordable homes to meet the needs of our residents, and there are over 9,000 affordable homes managed by registered providers in the District¹⁶.

Housing and the economy

Employment opportunities are critical to delivering a balanced housing market, and across West Berkshire the number of jobs is higher than the south east average and similarly there is a greater proportion of adults who are economically active.

Table 3 - Private rental values in West Berkshire since 2013²¹

Monthly rental values (£s)	Year					
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Mean	870	941	1,014	1,007	1,041	1,050
Lower quartile	650	725	750	750	779	795
Median	795	850	880	895	925	925
Upper quartile	950	1,000	1,150	1,150	1,200	1,200

However, there is a risk that where employment opportunities do not match the skills of local residents the inward employment migration that results can place pressures on the local housing market, potentially removing housing opportunities for local people and increasing the reliance on social housing.

Housing affordability is inextricably linked to economic activity and West Berkshire Council’s Economic Development Strategy 2019-2036 sets out how the Council intends to work with its partners to address economic challenges. This strategy should therefore be read in conjunction with the Economic Development Strategy.

Across the South East affordability is a critical issue in all segments of the housing market, with people struggling to secure affordable and sustainable housing, whether seeking home ownership or seeking to rent. In many areas the cost of home ownership relative to earnings is high, and in West Berkshire the £346,500 average cost of a home¹⁷ is almost ten times that of average earnings¹⁸.

For those seeking to rent their home, average private rents have increased by just over 20% to meet demand¹⁹, which in West Berkshire is often driven by professionals seeking accommodation near their place of work, and this presents affordability challenges for local residents. People private renting pay the highest housing costs compared with home-owners with mortgages and social housing tenants²⁰.

For residents who are on low incomes and/or are in receipt of welfare benefits the continued low level of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reduces the availability of affordable accommodation. This is due to the resulting low value of housing benefit or (the housing costs element of) universal credit relative to market rent levels.

It is expected therefore that the affordability challenges facing many private renters will remain moving forward, unless there is a significant injection in the capacity within the private rental market.

The private rented sector is characterised by a younger age profile than other forms of market housing with private renters in the 25-34 age group forming the largest group by age nationally²³. At the same time the age of private renters is increasing²⁴ and can be attributed to the affordability challenges facing private renters in moving into home ownership.

Recent reforms relating to welfare benefits also have the potential to impact on housing affordability²⁵. At the end of March 2019 there were 156 West Berkshire households affected by the welfare benefit cap, and there were also 481 households affected by the under-occupation charge – 416 households subject to a 14% deduction, and 65 subject to a 25% deduction.

Table 4 - Private rental and LHA values in West Berkshire - 2018/19²²

Monthly rental values (£s)	Property size				
	Studio	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
Mean rental value	592	742	925	1,160	1,844
LHA rate (Newbury)	319.22	568.14	718.90	865.80	1,213.68
LHA rate (Reading)	351.61	682.98	865.80	989.91	1,365.52

The challenges relating to affordability are often felt hardest by key workers who may struggle to secure suitable accommodation local to their workplace. It is estimated that there are around 9.8m key workers across the country making up just over 30% of the workforce in the South East²⁶. Women are twice as likely to be key workers as men, and younger and older people who are key workers are more likely to be in low-paid employment²⁷.

There are a range of definitions of key workers and West Berkshire Council defines a key worker using the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership definition as set out in Appendix 2.

The Council’s Allocations Policy will provide additional preference to key workers to support their applications for social housing. This in addition to our collaborative work with our Registered Providers to enable a range of affordable housing will contribute towards addressing the affordability challenges that keyworkers face.

¹⁴ The stock was transferred by Newbury District Council
¹⁵ Formerly known as West Berkshire Housing Association
¹⁶ Table 100: number of dwellings by tenure and district, England, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>
¹⁷ Median house prices for administrative geographies: HPSSA dataset 9, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/medianhousepriceforationalandsubnationalgeographiesquarterlyrollingyearhpssadataset09>
¹⁸ ONS, House price to residence-based earnings ratio, Table 5b, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/ratioofhousepricetoresidencebasedearningslowerquartileandmedian>
¹⁹ Valuation Office Agency: private rental market statistics, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/private-rental-market-statistics#2019>
²⁰ MHCLG, English Housing Survey- Housing Costs and Affordability, 2018-19, 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/898397/2018-
²¹ Valuation Office Agency: private rental market statistics, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/private-rental-market-statistics#2019>

²² Valuation Office Agency: private rental market statistics, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/private-rental-market-statistics#2019>
²³ ONS, UK private rented sector: 2018, 2019, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/ukprivaterentedsector/2018>
²⁴ *ibid*
²⁵ The Impact of Welfare Reform Bill measures on affordability for low income private renting families, Shelter, 2011, https://england.shelter.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/334726/Impact_of_Welfare_Reform_Bill_measures_on_affordability_for_low_income_private_renting_families.pdf
²⁶ A £10 minimum wage would benefit millions of key workers, TUC, May 2020, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/ps10-minimum-wage-would-benefit-millions-key-workers>
²⁷ *ibid*

Homelessness

In December 2019 the Council adopted a new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy²⁸ based on a housing needs assessment underpinning and informing the interventions that the Council will take (with its partners) to prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping.

Homelessness is increasing across the country, and during 2018/19 1,765 households presented to West Berkshire Council as being threatened with homelessness, of which, just under one-third were assisted by the Council under our homelessness duties to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

Across West Berkshire in 2018/19, the most common reason for being threatened with homelessness was the loss of a private rented sector tenancy which impacted on 23% of households threatened with homelessness. The next most common reason for being threatened with homelessness was due to family or friends no longer being willing to accommodate.

During 2018/19 the lead applicant in homelessness applications (i.e. the head of the household) was most commonly aged 25-34 (29% of applications) and interestingly 10% of presentations were made by applicants over the age of 55.

In 2019 the Council adopted its own plan for preventing and reducing rough sleeping – ‘Reducing Rough Sleeping in West Berkshire: A plan to ensure that no-one has the need to sleep rough’²⁹. This plan sets out the actions that the Council will take to prevent and reduce rough sleeping working in partnership with a range of partners operating in the homelessness sector.

During 2018/19 the Council received £211k in Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI)³⁰ funding and this increased to £261k for 2019/20 and £475k for 2020/21. This funding has been used to deliver a range of interventions agreed with and monitored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Further funding of £102k was awarded to the Council in 2019 for delivery of Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP)³¹ interventions.

Nationally rough sleeping has risen year on year since 2010 until a reduction in 2018, while across West Berkshire the number of people sleeping rough has fluctuated over the same period, falling from a peak of 23 in 2014 to 18 in 2018. A further reduction to 10 rough sleepers in November 2019 demonstrates the success of the strong partnership working that has taken place during 2019 utilising the RSI funding.

Table 5 - Rough sleeping in England and West Berkshire since 2010³²

Area	Year									
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
England	1,768	2,181	2,309	2,414	2,744	3,569	4,134	4,751	4,677	4,266
South East	310	430	442	532	609	827	956	1,119	934	900
West Berkshire	5	6	11	8	23	15	14	20	18	10

²⁸ Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025, <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=48320&p=0>
²⁹ xxx
³⁰ MHCLG, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-government-initiative-to-reduce-rough-sleeping>
³¹ MHCLG, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rapid-rehousing-pathway-2019-to-2020-funding>
³² Rough sleeping snapshot in England 2019, Table 1, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2019>

Table 6 - Rough sleeping across Berkshire 2019³³

Local authority	Number of rough sleepers ³⁴	Number of rough sleepers per 1,000 households ³⁵
Bracknell Forest	22	0.44
Reading	28	0.40
Slough	25	0.45
West Berkshire	10	0.15
Windsor and Maidenhead	40	0.63
Wokingham	10	0.15

Specialist accommodation

There is a range of specialist accommodation that is required to meet individual’s needs, and this includes extra care housing for those requiring a specialist health care setting, sheltered housing, young person’s supported accommodation, hostel accommodation for single homeless persons, housing schemes for people with a learning disability, or for individuals with mental health needs.

West Berkshire Council is also delivering a specialist Housing First scheme with partners to provide housing for rough sleepers with complex needs who would ordinarily be refused housing due to those needs, and for whom the provision of a tenancy enables support to be better provided to tackle specific complex needs.

Gypsy, Traveller, and Travelling Showperson communities are often disadvantaged in accessing affordable housing solutions as suitable sites can be challenging to deliver. West Berkshire Council currently manages one Gypsy/Traveller site within the District and there is also a site accommodating Travelling Showpersons. The Council’s specialist ‘Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson Accommodation Assessment’ (2019) provides a detailed assessment of need for these groups

Housing solutions

Councils use two main approaches to support residents who are homeless or threatened with homelessness into sustainable accommodation – allocations of social housing, and private rented sector tenancies.

Councils are required to adopt a housing allocation policy that sets out how social housing will be allocated to residents and setting out qualifying criteria and other details. West Berkshire Council’s Housing Allocation Policy prioritises applicants based on individual circumstances with the aim of ensuring that applicants with the greatest need have the highest priority.

The scheme is delivered through a choice-based lettings scheme, whereby applicants are able to choose the social housing properties that they wish to place bids on, and then the applicant with the highest priority is offered the tenancy. This is in contrast to schemes where the Council allocates accommodation directly to the applicant with the greatest priority.

To further assist households who are threatened with homelessness, councils are able to secure private sector tenancies as an alternative to an allocation of social housing to end homelessness obligations. To achieve this councils will very often offer a range of incentives to improve partnership working with private landlords to increase supply of appropriate tenancies.

³³ Ibid
³⁴ Ibid
³⁵ Calculated using data from Table 100: number of dwellings by tenure and district, England, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>, and Rough sleeping snapshot in England 2019, Table 1, op cit

West Berkshire has a low number of empty homes, with 232 long-term empty homes as of October 2019. This is the lowest proportion (3.4%) in Berkshire with the next lowest proportion of empty homes being 5.5%, and the highest proportion being 12.0%.

These long-term empty homes have been empty for over six months. Properties that have been empty for over two years are subject to the Empty Homes Premium which enables the Council to apply a penalty under Council Tax legislation, and in West Berkshire this can result in the owner of a long-term empty home paying up to four times the Council Tax for an occupied property in the same band.

Park homes provide an important housing solution for many residents, who are often older residents in their retirement. Park homes are in effect temporary, moveable structures and owners lease pitches on often large sites, paying a site fee and being responsible for ensuring that their home is kept in good repair.

Privately-owned park home sites are required to be licensed by the local authority and following historical poor practices within the park home industry that in some cases resulted in residents being significantly disadvantaged, the government strengthened the regulation of park home sites through the Mobile Homes Act 2013.

Environmental considerations

West Berkshire Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019, and the Council’s Environment Strategy 2020 – 2030 sets out approaches to tackle the current climate crisis and achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. This strategy should therefore be read in conjunction with the Environment Strategy.

Housing is a key contributor to national carbon emissions through both the initial carbon footprint associated with delivering new-build housing, refurbishing existing housing and through energy use in homes. Energy use in homes alone accounts for 14% of UK emissions.

Approximately 12% of West Berkshire is at risk of flooding, whether that be from groundwater, surface water, or river water. While the planning process

provides appropriate mitigation for new housing development and the provision of new flood alleviation measures for certain areas (Thatcham), flooding remains a concern for existing housing stock in areas identified as remaining at risk.

There remain a number of areas of challenge associated with reducing the negative environmental impact of housing, including:

- Reducing the reliance on steel and concrete based building materials;
- Increasing the use of engineered timber construction methods in the context of fire safety regulation;
- Reducing the reliance on the gas network for heating and cooking appliances;
- Increasing the use of low-carbon sources of heating such as heat pumps and heat networks;
- Accelerating the uptake of energy efficiency and insulation measures;
- Improving indoor air quality and ventilation associated with thermal insulation;
- Improving water efficiency;
- Improving flood protection for homes at risk of flooding;
- Improving the levels of green spaces associated with housing, including trees on streets, vegetation on roofs, and sustainable drainage systems, and;
- Providing for or pedestrians, cyclists, public transport users and electric vehicle owners.

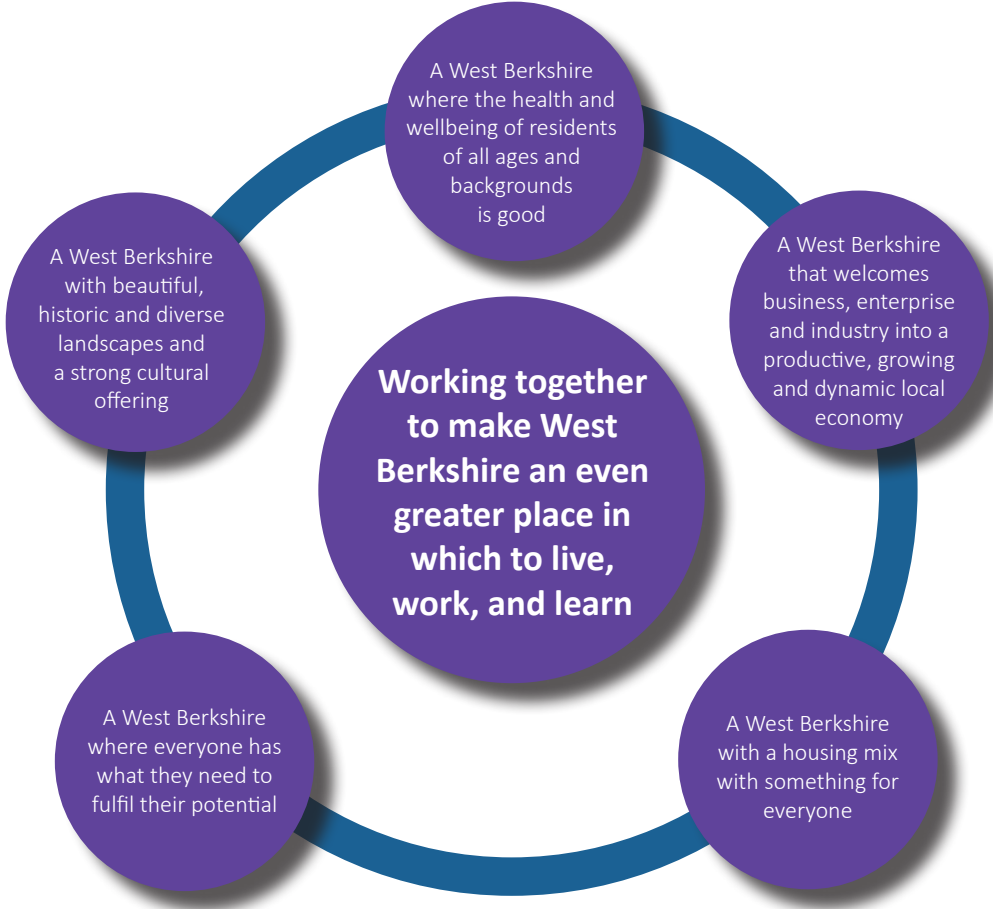
Many of the above measures are currently restricted through finance gaps, i.e. there is a cost associated with change. There is a risk therefore that the increased costs associated with embracing environmental considerations³⁶ may impact on future viability of housing development and in particular the delivery of affordable homes.

There are also opportunities to explore the potential savings associated with innovation, for example the speed of construction utilising modular timber-framed construction methods has the potential to offset the additional costs often associated with this approach and potential reduce costs when factoring in the additional revenue potential arising from earlier completions³⁷.

6 Our vision

West Berkshire Council’s corporate vision- ‘Working together to make West Berkshire an even greater place in which to live, work, and learn’ – is supported by the West Berkshire Vision 2036 that details priorities for the Council across five key areas and commits to creating:

- A West Berkshire where everyone has what they need to fulfil their potential
- A West Berkshire with a housing mix with something for everyone
- A West Berkshire that welcomes business, enterprise and industry into a productive, growing and dynamic local economy
- A West Berkshire where the health and wellbeing of residents of all ages and backgrounds is good
- A West Berkshire with beautiful, historic and diverse landscapes and a strong cultural offering



These commitments aim to maintain West Berkshire’s status as a great place to live, work and learn whilst rising to the challenges we anticipate facing in the future.

Building on our Strengths – the Council’s Corporate Strategy 2019-23 – sets out six priorities that align with the Council’s vision:

- Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes
- Support everyone to reach their full potential
- Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire
- Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy
- Maintain a green district
- Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships

7 Our priorities

This Housing Strategy aims to build on our previous successes and provide strategic direction for both the Council and our partners to continue to support a thriving housing market across West Berkshire through the following twin priorities:

- Priority 1** Enable every resident to have access to a home that meets their needs
- Priority 2** Reduce homelessness

The Housing Strategy priorities will be delivered through the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan as well as a range of strategies and plans that link to the Housing Strategy as set out below:



8 Delivering our priorities

This part of the strategy sets out what we are going to achieve and why. It also identifies areas for action and intervention and will frame our strategic priorities. Further detail and information is set out in the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan.

Priority 1 Enable every resident to have access to a home that meets their needs

There is a shortfall in the provision of housing of all tenures across West Berkshire, and the current Local Plan details that 520 homes are required to be built year on year to meet local housing demand. The emerging Local Plan is likely to reach a similar conclusion, although the overall annual requirement has yet to be determined it is likely to be in the range of 525 – 600 dwellings per annum.

- We will engage with landowners and developers to deliver the level of new homes as required through the Local Plan*
- We will utilise the Council's joint venture delivery vehicle to contribute to the delivery of new homes*
- We will deliver a Council-owned housing company to procure private rented accommodation let at rents that are affordable for residents*

A thriving housing market is reliant on a buoyant economy across West Berkshire to lever in appropriate housing investment across all tenures and sub-markets. A strong local economy supports demand for housing and promotes West Berkshire as a place to live.



The provision of employment opportunities also improves income levels and helps to mitigate the negative impact of welfare benefit reforms.

For West Berkshire to be a place where businesses choose to invest in housing, we need to ensure that our systems and processes are fit for purpose and interactions with businesses are effective and efficient, and our policies and decision making are robust and efficient to improve deliverability of development proposals.

We will proactively engage with developers and Registered Providers to provide advice in respect of development opportunities with the aim of removing unnecessary burdens and to be more responsive to business needs

The Council and its housing partners utilise a range of resources when assisting residents with housing-related interventions. This can range from delivering aids and adaptations to enable a vulnerable resident to remain in their own home, through to securing temporary accommodation to relieve homelessness.

These transactions have the potential to contribute positively to the local economy providing local businesses are utilised wherever practicable.

We will promote the use of local businesses in delivering value for money housing-related services wherever practicable

A vibrant and well-balanced housing market relies on West Berkshire providing the housing solutions that our residents want and can afford across all tenures and all affordability segments within the housing market.

Given the real affordability challenges in the local housing market, young people and key workers experience particular challenges in securing affordable housing in West Berkshire both through renting or home ownership products.

We will ensure that key workers are afforded priority within our Housing Allocations Policy to assist with securing low-cost housing

We will undertake research to identify the level of demand for affordable rent and discounted home ownership products from young people and key workers

For vulnerable residents this includes the provision of a suitable range of supported housing within the District that is affordable having regard to welfare benefit.

We will review the delivery of supported housing solutions across the District

West Berkshire has an ageing population and the number of residents requiring alternative housing solutions to enable them to live longer healthy lives will increase year on year. While the use of aids and adaptations will provide sustainable solutions for some residents to remain in their own homes, there will be a growing demand for innovative housing suited to the lifestyle of older residents.

We will review the delivery of Extra Care and Older Persons' housing schemes to meet the needs of an ageing population

The private rented sector across West Berkshire is not balanced and there is insufficient supply of smaller homes and in particular single-person shared accommodation to meet the demand. This is in part due to the housing typology within the District but also due to competing demands from professional renters who are often able to pay a premium to secure accommodation.

We will engage with private sector landlords to increase the supply within the private rented sector, and in particular within the HMO (houses in multiple occupation and shared houses) sector

Demand within the social housing sector is also high, driven by the affordability challenges facing many residents due to the disparity between housing costs (i.e. mortgage and rental payments) and their salaries.

The position is compounded by the low level of social housing stock that is present within West Berkshire that further increases demand for affordable accommodation.

We will engage with developers and Registered Providers to maximise delivery of affordable homes to meet the needs of residents within mixed tenure and inclusive neighbourhoods



Housing is a key determinant of health and poor housing directly impacts on poor health and well-being. This is obvious when considering health and safety hazards that may be present within the home (e.g. trip hazards resulting in physical injury) but is less obvious when considering psychological hazards (e.g. poor security resulting in a fear of crime and resultant stress and anxiety).

Poor housing can also have a negative impact on future life chances, for example children who grow up in overcrowded homes are less likely to attain high levels of educational achievement and this then limits future employment prospects and risks them living in poor housing in adult life.

Nationally the worst housing conditions can be found within the private rented sector. This is not the case for all private sector rented homes, indeed the majority of private rented properties are in excellent condition, however due to the size of the sector the small minority of homes that are in poor condition represents a large portfolio.

We will deliver a private sector stock condition survey to better understand the housing conditions within the private sector housing stock in West Berkshire

The majority of private landlords seek to comply with the diverse array of regulatory requirements that govern their business, however often they are simply unable to keep pace with regulatory change. This often restricts landlords from meeting their legal obligations despite their best intentions

We will deliver a private sector landlord forum as a vehicle for providing regulatory updates and sharing best practice as a means of improving standards within private rented accommodation

Self-regulation of the private landlord sector is a valuable method of improving both the image of the sector and providing residents with a valuable indicator as to whether a private landlord is likely to act professionally. There are a number of private landlord accreditation schemes that operate across the country and they provide training and development for landlords as well as enforcing proportionate codes of practice to ensure that landlords act professionally in their business.

We will introduce a private landlord accreditation scheme across West Berkshire to promote the business of being a professional landlord

The Council's private sector housing regulatory service is currently provided as part of the Public Protection Partnership which delivers environmental health and trading standards services across West Berkshire, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham. As such there are competing demands for resources to focus on private sector housing conditions and consequently capacity to improve the private rented sector is limited.

We will review enforcement of poor housing conditions within the private rented sector in accordance with the Public Protection Partnership's Private Sector Housing Policy to ensure that we are maximising our ability to improve private sector housing conditions

West Berkshire has an ageing population and the need to support independence is expected to grow year on year as residents become less able to lead healthy lives within their homes. There is currently limited information available to inform the future delivery of housing for older people and the needs of disabled residents across West Berkshire.

We will undertake a needs assessment to determine estimated future need for housing that meets the needs of older residents, disabled residents, and other residents whose needs are not suitably met by general needs housing

Priority 2 Reduce homelessness

The prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping remains a clear focus for the Council as the most effective intervention to secure housing solutions for residents who are threatened with homelessness. The interventions required to maximise performance in this area are discussed in detail in the Council's Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

We will deliver the actions set out in the Council's Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

The loss of private rented accommodation is the main driver for homelessness within West Berkshire and alongside the high demand for private rented accommodation local residents face significant challenges in securing affordable private rented accommodation.

We will introduce a package of measures to incentivise private landlords to accommodate residents who are threatened with homelessness to reduce the need for the Council to secure temporary accommodation under its homelessness obligations



Newbury is a key hub for many housing services that support our most vulnerable residents. However, the delivery of these services can result in other vulnerable people migrating from other local authority areas and in its extreme form can increase the incidence of rough sleeping.

Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness and within West Berkshire is largely found in and around Newbury town centre and consequently can have a negative impact on the perceptions of both local residents and visitors to the town which may influence future shopping behaviours.

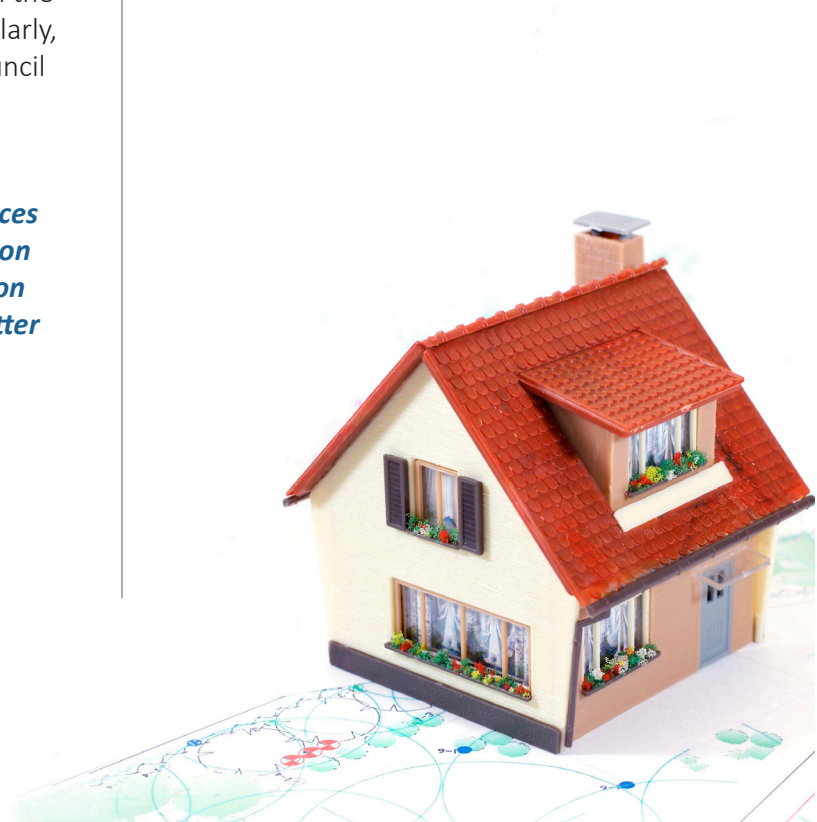
We will continue our work with our partners to reduce rough sleeping through a range of interventions focussed on supporting individuals to access accommodation pathways appropriate to individual needs

We will continue to deliver Rough Sleeping Initiative projects as agreed with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government to reduce the number of people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough

The provision of services for single homeless people are currently focussed in Newbury, and this has the potential to disadvantage service users in both the western and eastern areas of the District. Similarly, as the need for services has increased the Council has commissioned services largely within the Newbury area, including hostel provision.

We will review the provision of support services for the single homeless, including the provision of smaller units of hostel-type accommodation distributed throughout West Berkshire to better meet local need.

“The Housing Strategy Delivery Plan will provide the full detail of how the Council intends to deliver on the priorities set out in this strategy”



Appendix 1 – Key achievements from the previous Housing Strategy

We have reflected on our achievements through the previous Housing Strategy period and these are set out below grouped by theme:

Homelessness prevention

- Prevented 1,835 households from becoming homeless through early intervention between April 2010 and March 2015 with an average of 2,200 each year since
- Housing Options service awarded NPSS Silver Award for operational good practice
- Introduced a Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) partnership to challenge systemic barriers impacting on residents with complex needs, including rough sleeping, offending, mental health and substance misuse

Rough sleeping

- Working with partners the number of rough sleepers has reduced from a peak of 23 in 2014 to 10 in November 2019
- Introduced the Rough Sleeper Task and Targeting Group in 2014 to tackle rough sleeping through multi-agency working
- Successfully bid for Rough Sleeper Initiative funding resulting in an allocation of £211k in 2018/19, and a further £261k for 2019/20 to tackle rough sleeping
- Successfully bid for Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding of £102k for 2019/20 to improve the housing pathways for people sleeping rough

Delivery of affordable homes

- Delivered 336 affordable homes between April 2010 and March 2015 with an average of 127 each year since

Provision of Housing Assistance

- Approved on average over 100 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) each year to assist disabled residents to live independently in their homes
- Processed 1,798 applications for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to support residents receiving Universal Credit or Housing Benefit to remain in their homes at a point of crisis
- Introduced the West Berkshire Collective Energy Switching Scheme in 2016, saving over 660 households a total of £148,916 since the scheme started.

Providing support to vulnerable residents

- Introduced the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) approach in 2017 to break down barriers preventing vulnerable adults from accessing key Council services

Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs

- Allocated 8 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers at New Stocks Farm, Aldermaston
- Allocated 24 plots for Travelling Showpersons at Long Copse Farm, Enborne
- Approved 2 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers at Woolhampton
- Delivered the Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson Accommodation Assessment 2019
- Completed preparatory work to enable the refurbishment and redesign of the Council’s Gypsy/ Traveller site

Partnership working

- The Homelessness Strategy Group formed to represent the diverse range of strategic partners working within West Berkshire to prevent homelessness and/or support homeless households
- Introduced a Housing First partnership providing sustainable accommodation with targeted support for entrenched rough sleepers with complex needs.

Appendix 2 – Key worker definition

The Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership definition of the job roles that are considered to be key workers comprises:

- Clinical staff employed by the NHS (excluding doctors and dentists)
- Teachers, including further education teachers and Early Years/nursery teachers
- Police officers and community support officers
- Frontline police staff (civilians) may also be eligible in some areas
- Prison officers and some Prison Service staff in prisons
- Probation officers (senior or not) and, for intermediate rent only, trainee probation officers
- Local authority (LA) or local education authority (LEA) or NHS social workers
- LA therapists (including occupational therapists and speech and language therapists)
- LA educational psychologists
- LA/LEA/NHS nursery nurses
- LA planners
- LA clinical staff
- Uniformed staff, below principal level, in fire and rescue services
- Armed forces personnel and some civilian Ministry of Defence (MoD) personnel (i.e. clinical staff, MoD police officers and uniformed staff in the Fire and Defence Service), also including some discharged personnel
- Highway Agency traffic officer staff
- LA environmental health officers/practitioners.

Housing Strategy Delivery Plan

Action		Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
				Risks	Mitigation			
Priority 1 Enable every resident to have access to a home that meets their needs								
1.1	Engage with landowners and developers to deliver the level of new homes as required through the Local Plan	Annual delivery of new housing to exceed published Local Housing Need (currently 507 dwellings per annum)	Planning consents and the delivery of new homes matches the Local Plan requirement	Reduction in scale of planning application received for housing development	Current land supply provides for 7.8 years of housing delivery	April 2021	March 2036	Housing Development /Planning Policy
1.2	Utilise the Council's joint venture delivery vehicle to contribute to the delivery of new homes	XX homes delivered by 2036	Annual delivery of new homes	Insufficient viable development opportunities	Mixed tenures considered to cross-subsidise delivery	April 2021	March 2036	Housing Board
				Delays in obtaining planning consent	Development forward plan reviewed by Housing Board			

Action	Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
			Risks	Mitigation			
1.3 Deliver a Council-owned housing company to procure private rented accommodation let at rents that are affordable for residents	Housing company established	Incorporation agreed by Housing Board	Business case not agreed	N/A	In progress	December 2022	Housing Board
1.4 Proactively engage with developers and Registered Providers to provide advice in respect of development opportunities with the aim of removing unnecessary burdens and to be more responsive to business needs	Reduction in time taken to reach planning decisions for major developments by XX%	Time taken to make decisions in respect of major development applications	Staffing capacity	Review resources and submit a pressure bid if required	April 2021	March 2022	Planning

Action	Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
			Risks	Mitigation			
1.5 Promote the use of local businesses in delivering value for money housing-related services wherever practicable	Procurement exercises for housing-related services promoted to local businesses	Percentage of procurement exercises promoted to local businesses	Lack of capacity locally may result in wider procurement exercise to ensure housing related service are delivered	Market research and support from Procurement Team	April 2021	January 2022	Housing Service Manager

Action	Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
			Risks	Mitigation			
1.6	Ensure that key workers are afforded priority within our Housing Allocations Policy to assist with securing low-cost housing	Allocations Policy sets out priority for key workers	Number of housing allocations made to key workers	Delay in implementing revised Housing Allocations Policy due to staffing capacity	Redirection of staffing resources to deliver	In progress March 2021	Housing Service Manager
1.7	Undertake research to identify the level of demand for affordable rent and discounted home ownership products from young people and key workers	Key worker review completed	Review reported to Housing Board	Staffing capacity	Use of external consultants to deliver review	July 2021 March 2022	Housing Board
1.8	Review the delivery of supported housing solutions	Supported housing review completed	Review reported to Housing Board	Staffing capacity	Use of external consultants to deliver review	March 2021 September 2021	Housing Board

Action	Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
			Risks	Mitigation			
across the District							
1.9	Review the delivery of Extra Care housing schemes to meet the needs of an ageing population	Extra Care housing review completed	Review reported to Housing Board	Staffing capacity	Use of external consultants to deliver review	June 2021 January 2022	Housing Board
1.10	Engage with private sector landlords to increase the supply within the private rented sector, and in particular within the HMO (houses in multiple occupation and shared houses) sector	Increased number of high-quality HMOs within the private rented sector by XX%	Number of licensed HMOs	Staffing capacity	Increase staffing through utilising enforcement income	April 2021 March 2024	Public Protection Partnership

Action	Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
			Risks	Mitigation			
1.11	Engage with developers and Registered Providers to maximise delivery of affordable homes to meet the needs of residents within mixed tenure and inclusive neighbourhoods	Increase in number of affordable homes completed by 10% each year	Number of affordable homes completed	Site viability	Facilitate use of external funding, e.g. through Homes England	April 2021 Annually	Housing Development
1.12	Deliver a private sector stock condition survey to better understand the housing conditions within the private sector housing stock in West Berkshire	Private sector stock condition survey completed by specialist contractor	Survey reported to Housing Board	Budgetary pressure	N/A	June 2021 December 2021	Housing Board

Action	Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
			Risks	Mitigation			
1.13	Deliver a private sector landlord forum as a vehicle for providing regulatory updates and sharing best practice as a means of improving standards within private rented accommodation	Quarterly private landlord forum established	Landlord forum dates	Lack of interest from private landlords	Devise forum in conjunction with a national landlord association to increase relevance and market the forum to a larger audience	April 2021 April 2022	Public Protection Partnership
1.14	Introduce a private landlord accreditation scheme across West Berkshire to promote the business of being a professional landlord	Private landlord accreditation scheme launched	Number of accredited private landlords	Lack of interest from private landlords	Devise scheme in conjunction with a national landlord association to increase relevance and market the scheme to a larger audience	June 2021 September 2021	Public Protection Partnership

Action		Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
				Risks	Mitigation			
1.15	Review enforcement of poor housing conditions within the private rented sector in accordance with the Public Protection Partnership's Private Sector Housing Policy to ensure that we are maximising our ability to improve private sector housing conditions	xx private rented sector dwellings improved each year	Number of private rented sector dwellings improved	Staffing capacity	Review use of civil penalty income to increase staffing resource	April 2021	March 2024	Public Protection Partnership
1.16	Undertake a needs assessment to determine estimated future need for housing that meets the	Housing needs assessment completed	Review reported to Housing Board	Staffing capacity	Use of external consultants to deliver review	June 2021	January 2022	Housing Board

Action	Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
			Risks	Mitigation			
	needs of older residents, disabled residents, and other residents whose needs are not suitably met by general needs housing						

Action		Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
					Risks	Mitigation		
Priority 2 Reduce homelessness								
2.1	Deliver the actions set out in the Council's Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy	Actions detailed in the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy delivered	Project update reports considered by the Housing Board	As detailed in the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy action plan		In progress	March 2025	Housing Service Manager
2.2	Introduce a package of measures to incentivise private landlords to accommodate residents who are threatened with homelessness to reduce the need for the Council to secure temporary accommodation under its	Private landlord incentives implemented	Number of households threatened with homelessness prevented from becoming homeless through use of landlord incentive	Poor take up of incentives by landlords	Use private landlord forum to promote incentive scheme	In progress	March 2021	Housing Service Manager

Action		Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
				Risks	Mitigation			
	homelessness obligations							
2.3	Continue our work with our partners to reduce rough sleeping through a range of interventions focussed on supporting individuals to access accommodation pathways appropriate to individual needs	Eliminate rough sleeping by 2027	Number of rough sleepers as identified at the annual November count	External factors influence rough sleeping	Ensure the service is flexible to meet changing demands	In progress	November 2027	Housing Service Manager
2.4	Continue to deliver Rough Sleeping Initiative projects as agreed with the Ministry of Housing	Rough Sleeping Initiative projects delivered as agreed with MHCLG	Annual reporting to MHCLG	Change in needs of rough sleeping cohort	Projects under continuous review with MHCLG with the ability to flex projects to meet emerging need	In progress	March 2021	Homelessness Reduction Co-ordinator

Action	Outcome	Performance measures	Risk management		Start	Completion	Owned by
			Risks	Mitigation			
	Communities and Local Government to reduce the number of people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough						
2.5	Review the provision of support services for the single homeless, including the provision of smaller units of hostel-type accommodation distributed throughout West Berkshire to better meet local need.	Review reported to Housing Board	Staffing capacity	Use of external consultants to deliver review	July 2021	March 2022	Housing Board
	Review of support services completed						



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