

Housing Strategy

Consultation Summary Report

Why we consulted?

The Housing Strategy is a key corporate strategy that sets out how the Council intends to influence and intervene within the local housing market for the benefit of residents.

The delivery of the new Housing Strategy is a key corporate priority and in accordance with the Council's Consultation Policy a public consultation exercise is required to ensure that residents and other stakeholders are able to contribute to the formation of the strategy. The draft strategy proposes two key priorities for intervention and sets out areas for action. These actions will be detailed further in a delivery plan that will be finalised once the strategy is adopted.

The previous Housing Strategy covered the period 2010-2015 and the proposed strategy is intended to provide the strategic housing framework for the period up to 2036. This will ensure that the strategy links with the Council's corporate vision, but will also provide the ability to secure longer-term interventions in the housing market that are less likely to be achieved within a shorter period. The strategy aims to link with relevant corporate strategies and provides the framework for the delivery of specific housing plans and policies, such as, the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025.

The draft strategy has been developed working with internal partners and stakeholders and has also been subject to consultation with the Housing Board and local residents.

Approach

We developed and implemented a comprehensive communication plan to ensure that we consulted extensively and in a range of different ways. We published the proposals and questionnaire regarding the changes on our consultation website pages. The questionnaire was available for a six week period with feedback requested by midnight on 1st November 2020.

Respondents were directed to the draft strategy to read before answering the questionnaire. A total of 477 stakeholders submitted feedback but of these only 271 responses were viable for data analysis. Many were abandoned after the first initial question was answered and there was a high rate of unanswered questions throughout the responses.

We set up a dedicated email address to deal with any questions relating to the consultation process including queries about the ability to access the questionnaire. We also printed copies of the proposed document and questionnaire following enquiries and made them available on request.

An invitation to provide feedback on the draft housing strategy was sent by email to the following groups:

- All applicants on the housing register

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- Tenants in temporary accommodation provided by the Council
- Voluntary sector
- Registered Providers
- Internal departments and partner organisations

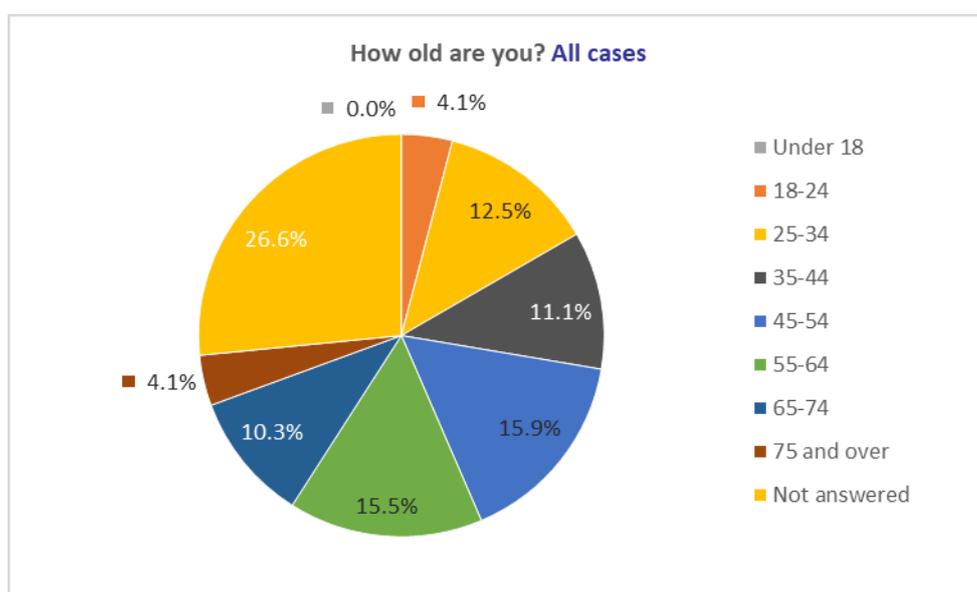
Finally, we issued a press release and further publicised our consultations through our Facebook and Twitter accounts as well as the council's website. Please see Appendix 1 for the communications plan.

Consultation Response

Number of responses and main category of respondents

In total 271 responses were received that had answered the questions or provided comments for data analysis. 85% of responses were from West Berkshire residents. 7% did not choose a category and the remaining 3 categories had responses of 4% and under. We have included key stakeholder feedback at the end of this report.

The percentage of responses per age range are shown in the graph below. There was a poor response rate from the younger age ranges and the 75 and over. The largest portion of the responses were from the 45 to 64 age range.



Only 17% of the responses were from key workers. The remaining were from non key workers or did not give a response to the question. Of those that said that they were a key worker, the largest percentage were care workers and the smallest response was from health care workers.

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Summary of Main Points

Respondents agreed that the draft strategy captures the relevant local housing issues.

- 76.4% agreed or strongly agreed with proposed priority 1
- 75.2% agreed or strongly agreed with proposed priority 2
- 42.8% agreed or strongly agreed with the delivery plan to address priorities 1 and 2.
- 31% agreed or strongly agreed that the proposed delivery plan will result in positive housing outcomes for them across West Berkshire
- 52.4% thought that the draft strategy was clear and easy to understand.

There was some overarching messages throughout the feedback that have been addressed later on in this report but have been extrapolated below:

- Residents are worried about the impact on the local infrastructure and the environment due to the development of the houses
- Respondents thought that too much emphasis was put onto expensive private rentals and not enough on social affordable housing.
- The definition of affordable housing needs to be explained
- Not enough emphasis is on development of quality, energy efficient houses as a pose to quantity
- There is not enough being done to address the physical and mental issues of why residents become homeless in the first place and provide support to help them re-build their lives.

All of the individual comments from respondents were reviewed and the responses have been broken down by survey question below:

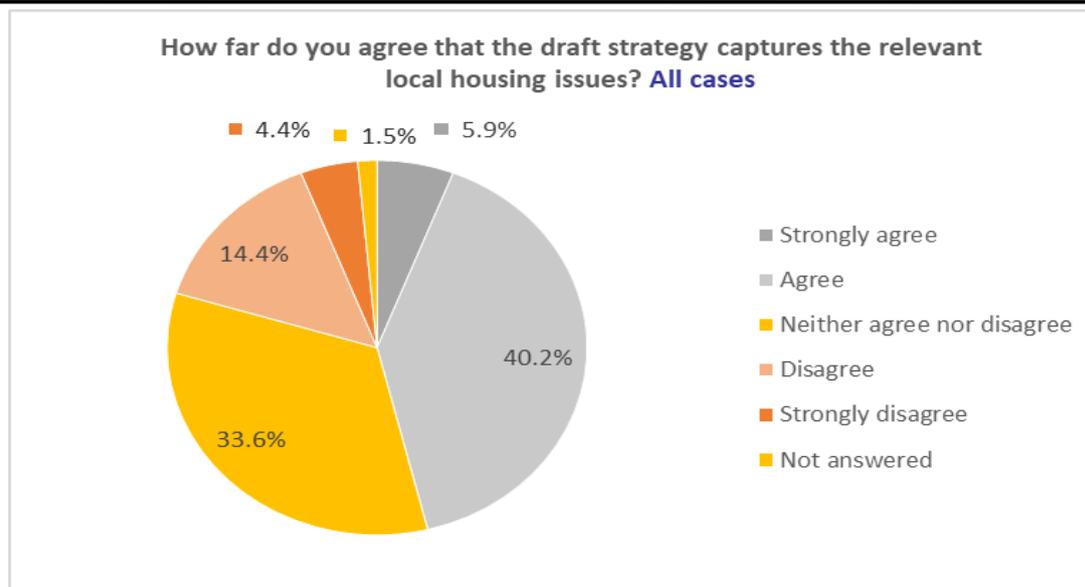
Summary of Responses by Question

1. How far do you agree that the draft strategy captures the relevant local housing issues?

The data in the table below shows that 46.1% of respondents who expressed a view agreed or strongly agreed with the changes and only 18.8% were against the change. 33.6% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. There were a further 1.5% of respondents who did not answer this question.

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A number of comments were raised and these are identified below:

- **Comment:** There needs to be more emphasis on the environmental impacts and how to build energy efficient homes whilst improving the local infrastructure and developing it further to cope with all the new properties.
- **Response:** The infrastructure to support the additional homes will be aligned with the Local Plan. As part of the feedback the Climate Emergency focus will be revisited in terms of emphasis within the plan.
- **Comment:** There is a disproportionate emphasis on homelessness and rough sleeping. There are not enough actions identified to tackle those that make themselves intentionally homeless.
- **Response:** There are 2 key priorities and the resources are balanced according to the needs of each priority. Actions to tackle those that make themselves intentionally homeless are addressed in the new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025
- **Comment:** The strategy does not cover building new stock of a higher standard, retrofitting of existing houses and the lack of opportunity for owner-builders to buy plots of land or develop their own homes.
- **Response:** This point will be made clearer in the updated draft strategy and will incorporate the opportunity for owner-builders to buy plots of land to develop their own homes through initiatives such as 'Self-Build.'
- **Comment:** Respondents wanted to know what was the plan to redevelop brown field sites over green field sites to preserve recreational areas and countryside?
- **Response:** This is addressed in our Core Strategy Development Plan documentation which will sit alongside the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan.
- **Comment;** The strategy is based on the need to provide 10,500 homes over the next 20 years. There is no breakdown of the figures to justify the claim and it

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doesn't take into account the number of properties that will become available over time due to tenants passing or moving to care homes.

- **Response:** The need to provide 10,500 homes has been taken from the Local Delivery Plan which looks at housing need across the district in greater detail. The Housing strategy will support the Local Delivery Plan adoption to ensure it is in line with the interests of the district. Relets will not form part of the 10,500 homes as they are not new additional homes.
- **Comment:** The strategy seems to sway towards increasing the rented sector or supporting private property developers who are only interested in profits, rather than trying to help people secure their own homes. An approach to support not for profit organisations to build and offer real affordable rented properties or properties for sale would be better suited to solve the current housing issues.
- **Response:** In order to fully address housing need for the district we have to look at all tenures therefore we need to include details about the private rented sector and not just social housing and other affordable housing products. We also work in partnership with our Registered Providers and Homes England to ensure that we deliver the Affordable Housing Programme which provides housing that is not for profit and increasing the supply of affordable rented properties or properties for sale.
- **Comment:** There is no mention on how to tackle the increasing housing need as a result of COVID-19 and what the economic impact of this might be.
- **Response:** We have noted the importance of including the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing need and will include this within the final strategy.

Comments in support of the strategy:

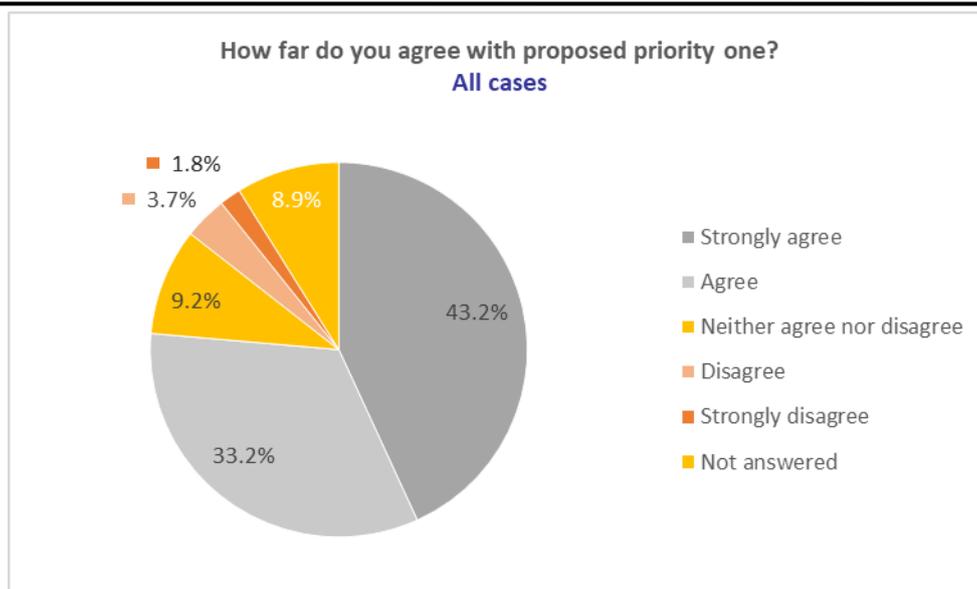
- 'It does identify the issues, especially the lack of homes for social rent and affordability',
- 'Seems comprehensive, shows understanding of the issues, depicts a council with a social conscience'.

2. How far do you agree with proposed priority one? – Enable every resident to have access to a home that meets their needs.

The table below shows that there was very strong support for priority one with over 76.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing with it. 5.5% did not agree or disagree or disagreed with the proposal plus 8.9% who neither agreed nor disagreed and 9.2% who did not answer the question

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A number of comments were raised and these are identified below:

- **Comment:** The use of HMOs as mentioned in the strategy is one that some people will not engage with, I fear that those with dual diagnosis issues will find themselves unable to access mental health accommodation and will not cope in a shared environment. They also see a far higher turnover of tenants than other rental options.
- **Response:** This will be linked to our new Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy that also incorporates complex needs and support relating to accommodation for single people. In addition, the Market Position Statement for Adult Social Care also captures how we will help our residents to access specialist accommodation such as those linked to mental health.
- **Comment:** Excellent target but how will it be met and measured?
- **Response:** The draft strategy details a number of interventions to deliver the proposed priorities. These are further detailed within the delivery plan which will be finalised once the strategy is adopted. The plan will detail how each intervention will be delivered.
- **Comment:** Agreed, but what is the definition of appropriate housing and how is this worked out?
- **Response:** We have included a glossary of terms with the final strategy which will clarify definitions and the data source can be found as a footnote at the end of the page.
- **Comment:** How are the environmental considerations taken into account when developing the properties?
- **Response:** The environmental considerations are addressed in our Core Strategy Development Plan documentation and will also link to the Environment Strategy which will sit alongside the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan.

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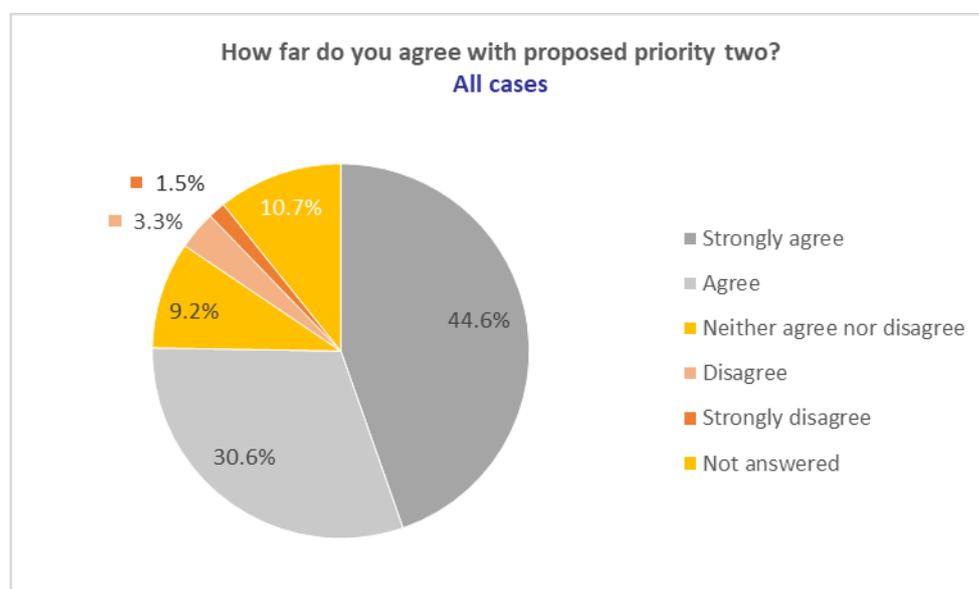
- **Comment:** The design guidance of West Berkshire Council is out of date
- **Response:** This will be updated as part of the final housing strategy

Comments in support of the Strategy:

- '100% no one should live in cold, damp or cramped homes or ill equipped homes'.
- 'An adequate house is essential for every person'.

3. How far do you agree with proposed priority two? Reduce Homelessness

Respondents were asked how far they agreed with proposed priority two to reduce homelessness. 75.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this and less than 4.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Only 9.2% did not agree or disagree. The remaining percentage did not answer this question which equated to 10.7%



A number of comments were raised and these are identified below:

Comment: The excellent execution of previous strategies has reduced homelessness to 10 in West Berks. I think that this as a second priority out of two is rather imbalanced. The signal is that for a population of 10 West Berks dedicates 50% of its strategic housing intent. I would have expected key workers to be taken out of priority 1 into a separate priority.

Response: There are 2 key priorities and the resources are balanced according to the needs of each. It is important that keyworkers can also access a home that meets their needs and this is included in the priority that this falls in.

Comment: In this area there is a lack of suitable temporary accommodation for people that present as homeless and they are often placed many miles from their support network and the schools that their children attend. We understand that it takes time to investigate whether someone is intentionally homeless and for the

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decision to be relayed to the claimant. There should also be a hostel facility for couples.

Response: There has been significant changes made regarding temporary accommodation. The council has purchased an additional twenty units of temporary accommodation in the district and no longer makes placements out of the district. Placements are made in the district as close to support networks as possible. Our hostel facilities adequately meets the needs of the district and our temporary accommodation meets the interim needs under S188 of the HRA (Homelessness Reduction Act) 2017 for other households that are not single.

Comment: Building more homes is not going to solve homelessness. Simply building what you deem to be 'affordable' homes is not going to provide the homeless with employment or an ability to afford a home. Even what are deemed affordable homes are simply not affordable to the homeless or those on low incomes?

Response: We have adopted a new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 which addresses affordability for those on low incomes or homelessness.

Comments: The priority should be to eradicate homelessness rather than just reduce it. It was eradicated during lock down so can be achieved

Response: At any one point a different cohort of residents will be homeless due to changes in circumstances. There are also a small minority who do not want to be housed and want to remain street homeless but have worked in partnership with our strategic partners and voluntary sector partners to continue to reduce homelessness. Homelessness was not eradicated during lock down in the UK as many individuals were placed in hotel provision to stop the spread of Covid-19 but some still remained street homeless as they refused the housing offer. West Berkshire similar to other Local Authorities have an ambition to eradicate homelessness in line with central government's targets and are working hard to sustain the reduction of homelessness in the district.

Comment: Some of the homeless population have been given accommodation many times but have neglected and abused the place. Why should they then be offered yet another?

Response: As per our Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy this sets out reasons for homelessness which will provide a useful insight into why accommodation is refused and the cycle of homelessness and what support we put in place to work with the homeless population to help them.

Comment: We need to look at why people are homeless in the first place and the Health and Social reasons. Many suffer from addiction yet agency funding to help them has been cut. This then feeds into the issue that many of those that are homeless don't want to use a hostel due to the drug taking which needs to be addressed first.

Response: We have adopted a new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 which addresses the health and social reasons of why residents become homeless and provide appropriate agency support.

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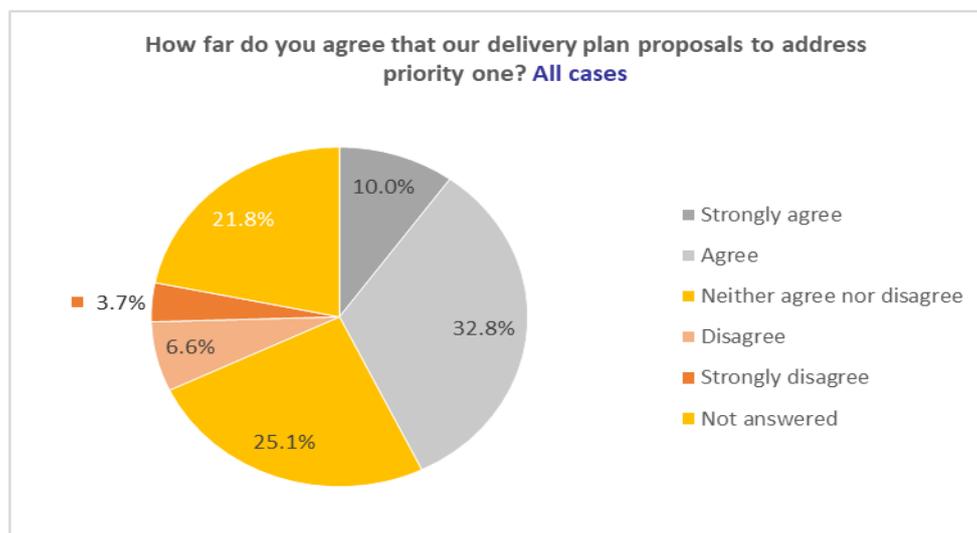
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Comments in support of the Strategy:

- 'Access to well maintained and step up housing should be a priority'
- 'homelessness can be the cause of many situations and many situations can be the cause of homelessness. It could happen to anyone at any time. Housing First has proven successful all over the world and every one should be given the chance to have a home in which to feel safe and secure.'
- The health and social issues around homelessness need resolving and the support to deal with those issues is not just about providing roofs over heads. I am pleased to see that in the West Berkshire area the council has been more pro-active than in many other areas

4. How far do you agree that our delivery plan proposals address priority one?

Respondents were asked how far they agreed that the delivery plan proposals addressed priority one – the table below shows, enable every resident to have access to a home that meets their needs. 42.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the plan does. Less than 10.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 25.1% did not agree or disagree and 59 respondents did not answer this question which equalled 21.8% of respondents.



A number of comments were raised and these are identified below:

Comment: "Page 21. 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" It is vital that parents of children with disabilities/people with disabilities/occupational therapists/specialist architects for people with disabilities are consulted as part of this "needs assessment". A needs assessment is only helpful if it consults and works closely with relevant stakeholders."

Response: A communications plan will be created in order to ensure that relevant stakeholder feedback is captured during consultation for the needs assessment.

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Comment: “I have one specific concern, which is that the definition of keyworker excludes care staff. This is a crucial workforce, generally poorly paid and it is essential that their housing needs are met.”

Response: This has been addressed and the key worker definition has been updated in the strategy to reflect care staff within this category.

Comment: “There's a need to go further with social housing as so-called 'affordable' housing is only relative and is still very expensive, excluding a lot of people. We may be well off in West Berks, but we need people from all walks of life to be able to live here, for the benefit of the economy and society”

Response: Affordable housing is just that and West Berkshire made a commitment to help residents with affordability issues to access affordable housing by ensuring that we work with Registered Providers to enable social rent which is cheaper than Affordable Rent which is 80% of the market rent.

Comments: The private rental accommodation is not being made accessible enough, many landlords are asking for guarantors which not everyone can provide. HMOs cost the same as a social tenancy but are far smaller and provide none of the security.

Response: Accessibility to private rental accommodation and HMO's are being addressed as part of the delivery plan on the Housing Strategy.

Comments: There is no mention about keeping the type of properties required under review and encouraging developers to provide homes that fit the necessary profile, rather than creating expensive properties that maximise their profits. It also doesn't cover whether planning consents should be time limited to ensure developers are not sitting on land to increase their profits.

Response: This is addressed in our Core Strategy Development Plan documentation which will sit alongside the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan. The Local Plan will also feed into this to ensure that development fits in with the needs of the District.

Comments: There does not seem to be concrete proposals for where the housing will be developed along with the relevant improvement of services in the area. For instance Newbury has recently reached its limit for water provision and Thames Water are effectively rationing supply through the reduction of pressure in the system. More housing development will result in extra demand on the current infrastructure, has this been taken into account?

Response: The location of additional homes will be outlined in the Local Plan which will also include local infrastructure improvements. As part of the feedback from this consultation the Climate Emergency focus will be revisited in terms of emphasis within the Housing Strategy.

Comments: There is a lot of investment currently from outside the area which is profit driven. We need to enable West Berkshire residents to be prioritised in the strategy over outside investors.

Response: This view underpins Priority 1 in the council's Housing Strategy and will be addressed within the delivery plan of this strategy.

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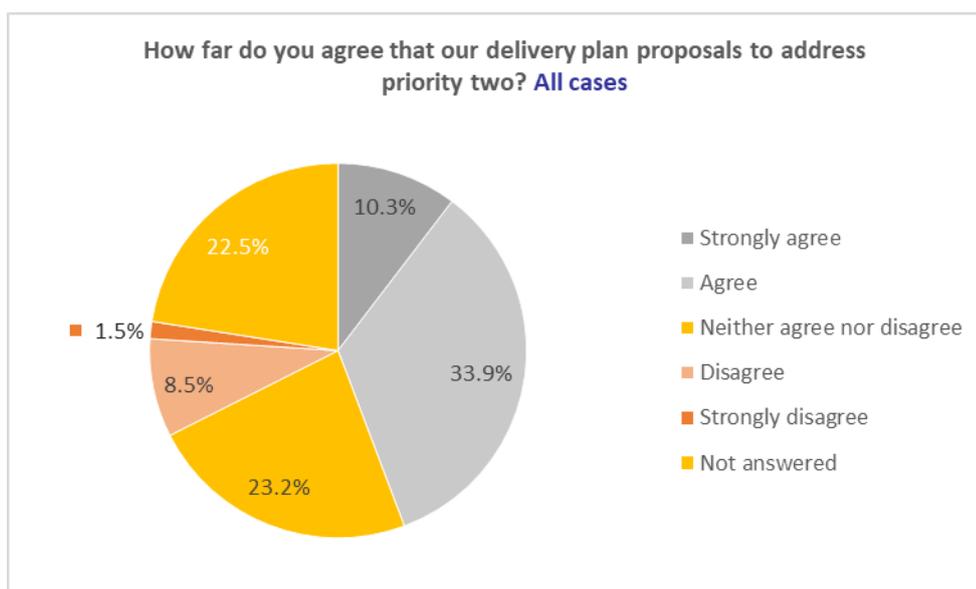
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Comments: Many people, at the lower end of the 'spectrum', wouldn't be able to afford to buy a home. They will always need to rent which is too high in the private sector for many. Social rent would resolve many of the housing issues as many can never aspire to buy.

Response: The Strategic Housing Market Assessment details that in order to meet housing need, new housing developments should provide an affordable housing mix comprising 70% social rent and 30% Shared Ownership houses. As a result there is a larger percentage of social rented accommodation being made available to residents to support those at the lower end of the 'spectrum' who are unable to afford to buy a property.

5. How far do you agree that our delivery plan proposal addresses priority two?

Respondents were asked how far they agreed that the delivery plan proposals addressed priority two – reduce homelessness. The table below shows that 44.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the plan does. 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 23.2% did not agree or disagree and 22.5% did not answer this question.



A number of comments were raised and these are identified below:

Comment: “Always a good idea to try to give homeless people a home, as it also prevents their turning to crime or becoming victims of crime. However, there will be some who don't want to be housed and some who have homes but choose not to live there. So, 'relevant' has lots of variables.”

Response: We have adopted a new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 which will address the needs of the homeless cohort and link to the Housing Strategy.

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Comment: “More opportunity for single homeless vulnerable people will make a huge difference to not only their lives but the whole community. Private rented opportunities for those clients is extremely difficult to secure due to vulnerabilities past history and stigma attached to being single and homeless. It would be really effective if there was a specific estate agent set up to help those secure PSL like they have done in Surrey. It works really well and that is a very affluent area but they still are able to help”.

Response: We have adopted a new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 which will provide more opportunities for single homeless vulnerable residents and outline how West Berkshire Council will seek to improve their current situations and opportunities.

Comment: Much more detail is needed on the package of measures intended to incentivise private landlords to accommodate people at risk of homelessness. What measures have worked in other local authority areas? Will this approach be sufficient, in a rapidly changing housing market, to offset the threat of homelessness? Given the likely reduction in demand for commercial premises post-Covid, would it not make more sense to invest in appropriately-specified low cost structures on vacant sites - an example that comes to mind would be insulated shipping containers, suitably spaced on a redundant commercial site on (say) Bone Lane in Newbury, not too far from essential services.

Response: We are currently working with our private landlords in the district regarding accommodation needs and the package of measures range from a tenant finder service, support and dedicated staff to financial incentives which is similar to what other local authorities provide. Alternative housing solutions will come out of the work carried out as part of the delivery of the housing strategy.

Comments: Hostels are temporary accommodations and not suitable for all single individuals experiencing homelessness. These individuals can spend a vast amount of time in a hostel before finding more suitable accommodation. Can more be done to ensure they spend less time in a hostel before finding more suitable accommodation i.e. supported housing?

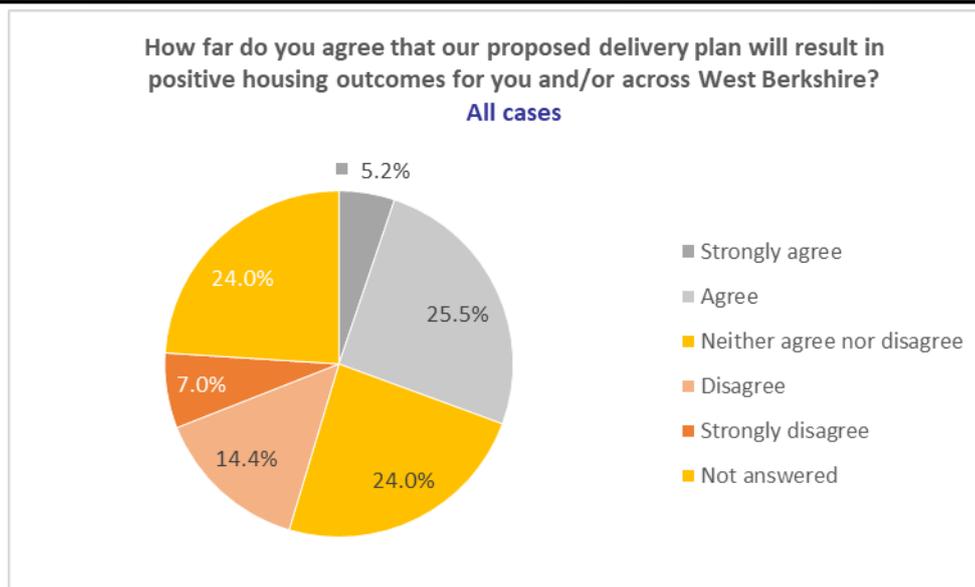
Response: West Berkshire has adopted a Move-on Strategy which is part of the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 and includes the use of hostels and temporary accommodation as part of this.

6. How far do you agree that our proposed delivery plan will result in positive housing outcomes for you and/or across West Berkshire?

Respondents were asked if they thought that the proposed delivery plan will result in positive housing outcomes. The table below shows that 30.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the plan will, 21.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed, 24% did not agree or disagree and 24% of respondents did not answer this question.

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A number of comments were raised and these are identified below:

Comment: “As part of the ageing population I am not sure there is enough in the plan to ensure suitable properties will actually get provided without exorbitant sale, leasehold or maintenance fees for the residents/owners that many of these developments charge”

Response: Our Affordable Housing Provision mix is 70% social rent and 30% shared ownership. There is a larger percentage of social rented accommodation being made available to meet the affordability aspect of our residents and we will be working with our Registered Providers on affordability in relation to shared ownership and service charges that align with your concerns about leasehold fees. In addition, Homes England will also be involved as part of continuous engagement regarding the development of these schemes.

Comment: “Needs a holistic consultation on infrastructure to support these 10500 extra homes, and also the further education growth expected in the age group of 15-19 year olds. 8.8% growth. Also the growth of the social care sector where the age range growth is expected to be 80.5% for over 75's. Climate Emergency needs more focus - carbon neutral builds, and green affordable housing in terms of build and also bills utilities for occupiers”

Response: The infrastructure to support the additional homes will be aligned with the Local Plan. As part of the feedback the Climate Emergency focus will be revisited in terms of emphasis within the plan.

Comments: There should be more emphasis on brownfield development and re-development, to protect greenfield sites in the areas of natural beauty.

Response: The Core Strategy Development Plan and Local Plan will address these concerns.

Comments: It is not firm enough on plans, targets and timelines. There are too many hard targets that these plans should have to hit and deadlines to deliver.

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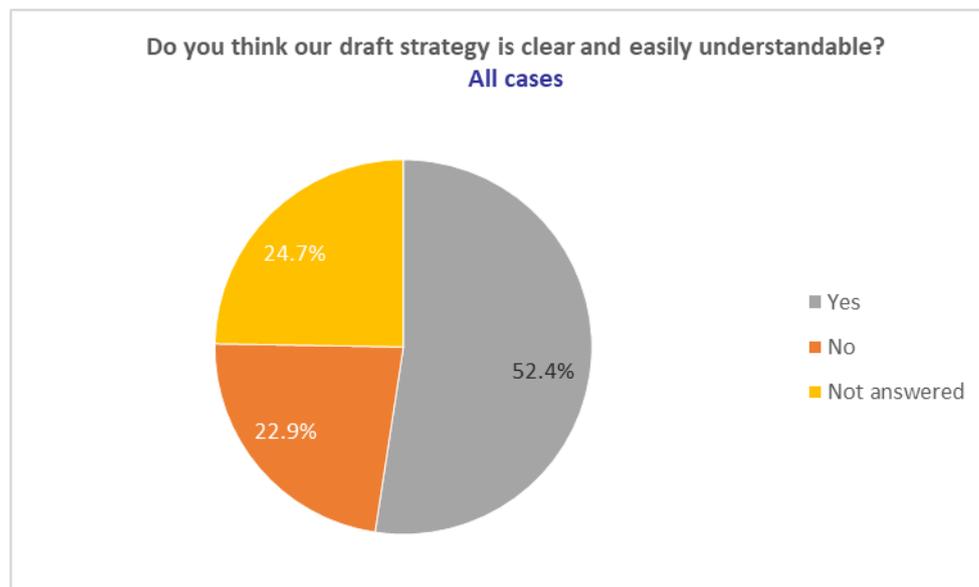
Response: This has been noted and we have reviewed the delivery plan and made amendments in light of this feedback.

Comment in support of the Strategy:

- This is an excellent well thought out strategy. Covid has given us a new way of looking at opportunities and working within the new norm. Let's bite the bullet and be innovative and get actively involved in delivering new affordable homes and lets really drive long term change with creative (but equally well thought out solutions).

7. Do you think our draft strategy is clear and easily understandable?

The table below 52.4% of respondents thought that the strategy was clear and easy to understand. Only 22.9% thought it wasn't whilst 24.7% did not answer the question.



A number of comments were raised and these are identified below:

Comments: It would have been useful to have a summary document to summarise the main points

Response: This will form part of the changes made to the final draft housing strategy

A sample of comments in support of the Strategy:

- Well thought out, in addition it flows well and sets out clear objectives
- I read the document and remained engaged - for a government document it avoided acronyms and outlined everything clearly
- It is very detailed and everything is explained.

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8. Do you have any additional comments?

A number of comments were raised and these are identified below :

Comment: What is the Council's joint venture delivery vehicle, and how does it function?

Response: The Joint Venture delivery vehicle was set up by the Council with Sovereign Housing Association to develop and grow opportunities in the market place such as increasing the supply of housing. There is a joint Board that governs and makes decisions about growth opportunities that is submitted to the JV to progress and complete.

Comment: "Children and adults with disabilities level of independence and quality of life is closely interconnected with the home environment and is highly dependent on space. There is not much detail within the strategy pertaining to meeting people with disabilities' highly specialist needs via planning and development at the early phase. Huge cost savings could be gained by working with partners to consult and adapt houses to meet specialist needs at the time of planning/building, rather than adapting afterwards using DFG funding. Space within the home is a key factor and most modern build has small rooms and is high density. Housing strategy often does not take into account the families of children with disabilities. Most specialist new build for people with disabilities has one carer and is an adult ie. 1 or 2 bedroom homes."

Response: We administer the Disabled Facilities Grant which addresses the housing needs of residents with disabilities and potential adaptations. Reference to this has been included within the updated Strategy.

Comment: "House builders are mainly interested in families (which are an important part of our community). But there are many family homes occupied by retired people. It would be useful to have a focus group aimed at starting a discussion with people who are per-retirement with no children or in early retirement to find out what accommodation they think they will require over the next 10 years and encouraging builders/developers to take these needs into account. This should free up family homes."

Response: This will be taken into consideration and we would also like to refer you to the Market Position Statement ASC which also addresses assistance that will be provided to older people.

Comment: The term affordable housing and social housing are not interchangeable and should be treated separately in the document/policy and where one is not applied it should be explicit. In the infographic on page 4 it mentions 2,300 households were in need of social housing, but does not mention how many received social housing 1.2 Depending how this measure is understood there is either no requirement to deliver new homes or the requirement to deliver one home per year until 2035 when the remainder can be delivered. 1.12 The return on investment of this objective should be scrutinised, as it appears to be a 'nice to have' and not a hard requirement, that will delivery material benefits. 1.13 The performance measure is very easy to achieve and will provide no benefits. I would suggest more thought should be put into what is actually required and a better

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objective is set. 1.14 The strategy seems to be moving off track. Why would the council want the private sector to fill the gaps in the housing needs of its residents?

Response: The delivery plan makes it clear how measures will be addressed and any scrutiny will be dealt with through the relevant Governance Board and for housing the main governance board is the Housing Board. In addition, the strategy will be subject to the Overview and Scrutiny. 1.14 The supply of homes is not just social housing it also includes private housing as well. So to this end we must consider all tenures in terms of supply and demand.

A sample of comments in support of the Strategy:

- Good effort. For many, the outcomes in the delivery plan are all that matter, and many of the relevant people will never read a strategy. Important to have it though, and good messages to the development sector.
- I found the report interesting to read and informative. There was very little repetition and I was interested in the facts about how WB shapes up compared to other authorities. I like the Landlord Accreditation Scheme. If this were supplemented with providing local councils with more influence over developers, then real change could be made. The Localism Act 2011 is key, if you're going to get local but in to the proposals.

Member and other stakeholder responses

Sovereign Housing Association:

Sovereign would like to see:

- More information on the demographic data and how it ties in with what is known about local income and affordability.
- The location and mix of tenure of new homes delivered through S.106
- The appetite for shared ownership homes over the next 5 years and the impact of Covid-19 on the current mortgage market.
- Plans for the local private housing market for younger people and how to address their needs.
- More information on the council-owned housing company
- Is there a possibility to extend the strategy to promoting lifetime homes or incentivising low carbon homes?
- More details on how West Berkshire will meet all of the needs of the aging population not just housing.
- More reference could be given to seeking opportunities to create more shared ownership opportunities for older people
- Consideration of homelessness and links to a 'tenancy ready' project
- Reflection of the homeless strategy actions in the strategy
- Consideration of working social landlords with proven track records to achieve outcomes that might be cost effective and provide added value in the services.
- Reference to a holistic approaches that addresses not just the physical housing need but also the support and prevention.
- The document refers to an assessment of needs for gypsy, traveller and travelling show person accommodation. But there are no specific proposals for meeting those needs.

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- More details of the plans to tackle the Environment challenge.

Response: This will form part of the changes made to the final draft housing strategy

Homes England: Affordable Homes Programme (AHP)

Homes England will be making grants available from April 2021 to support the capital costs of developing affordable housing for rent or sale. The funding is for the supply of new build affordable housing, homes for rent, social rent and affordable rent. This funding also supports the development of supported Housing, rural housing, traveller pitches and Empty homes. West Berkshire can apply for a grant to fund all of the aforementioned.

Response: This will form part of the changes made to the final draft housing strategy

The Newbury society

The Newbury Society would welcome more figures in the Strategy about the existing housing situation and trends. In particular, the numbers and percentages for social housing and privately-rented housing locally, as compared to the national averages; and the recent trends in both these figures.

Looking at the data it is difficult to understand why the council's priorities, as expressed in this document, are to produce more houses for purchase, rather than social housing. Surely this should be the priority?

How can steps towards Priority 1 be realised without promoting social housing?

Where the strategy is not prioritising housing for purchase, it looks to private rental. Market rents are not in any way affordable for people such as shop workers, factory operatives, cafe and catering staff. To prioritise the private rental sector above social housing, as appears to be the case in this strategy (e.g. pp. 20-21), is to fail to respond to the needs of local people.

In addition, many local villages are looking for genuinely-affordable houses for local people, who are often priced out of the area by house prices; so in practice this means social housing, rather than homes for sale to more commuters.

We hope there is some room within the national policy framework for a local expansion of social housing, and that the council will be aware of routes by which this can be pursued. To use taxpayers money to subsidise houses for purchase is a policy open to question when genuinely-affordable homes are in such demand. The recently-published planning White Paper proposes to reduce the amount of "affordable" housing obtainable through the planning process, which would be a retrograde step. We would like West Berkshire Council to call for central government to grant more freedom to local councils to provide genuinely-affordable housing where they feel it is needed (and this would include freedoms to raise and spend the money necessary to do so). This would allow local authorities to build good-quality houses and flats that people on minimum wage can afford, and still be

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able to feed and clothe a family. Nationally, we would like to see an emphasis on Registered Social Landlords being the providers of more genuinely-affordable housing, with suitable finance from government via the Public Works Loan Board or equivalent, and perhaps CIL money being divided between infrastructure and RSLs. David Peacock Newbury Society October 2020

Response: A number of these comments has already been addressed through our Affordable Housing Programme, where we specify that 70% Social Housing and 30% Shared Ownership is delivered. This aligns with our commitment to help residents on a low income because we are requesting social rent which is cheaper than Affordable Rent which is 80% of Market Rent. We have to consider all tenures therefore there needs to be an emphasis on both affordable housing and private rented sector housing.

Liberal Democrat Group response

Our Priorities

1. The Liberal Democrat Group give a very high priority to the provision of sufficient affordable housing. "Affordable" in our view means that any household with one or more members in work should be able to afford to live in a decent home. It includes costs of heating and powering all reasonable domestic appliances, as well as costs of finding, buying (or renting) and maintaining a home in good condition, sustaining the health of all occupants and of the local economy, i.e. all "housing costs" incurred by the occupier.
2. We also believe that helping to meet a family's laudable aspiration to own their own home is a secondary priority for a Housing Authority. It is more important to help every household achieve security of tenure, whatever that tenure might be. For many families, renting is more sensible than owning.
3. Also the needs of the tenant should always take priority over those of the landlord if there has to be a choice, especially where there are children or vulnerable adults involved. We want to see an early end to 'no fault eviction' and the introduction of intermediate tenure: it is unacceptable that families with children cannot plan ahead for settled schooling because they don't know if they might have to move out of the area after losing their home at the whim of a landlord.
4. We are opposed to many of this Government's – and its predecessor's - policies on housing, some of which are mentioned in the draft Strategy and acknowledged there as causing 'challenges'. Our comments below reflect that but should not be taken as a criticism of this Council or, in particular, of its Housing Service.
5. We note the very significant improvements achieved by the Service over recent years, especially in its own operations such as the prevention of homelessness. We applaud those responsible and we also concur with most of their plans to continue improving. Our comments are therefore intended to be constructive and supportive of the Council's ambitions.

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6. We support the Council's priorities in Section 7 but we remain unconvinced that Housing will receive the resources needed to achieve the Delivery Plan described in Section 8.

The National Context

7. We fully agree that the planning system is the "key mechanism" for achieving sufficient affordable new homes. We have supported the Administration in opposing the Government's proposed radical reforms set out in "Planning for the Future" and we believe these proposals have far more potential to undermine the delivery of sufficient and (by our definition) "affordable" new homes than they have for solving the current crisis of affordability in the housing market.
8. However the total number of new homes built in our District over the period of this Strategy can never be more than 10% of the total existing housing stock, so we focus in these comments on measures relating to the homes we already have or which are being built now. Our comments on future tenure mix, design and other aspects of new homes will be reserved for the Local Plan Review, although the Strategy does include details of these.
9. We note that almost half of the Actions in the Strategy have the words "staffing capacity" mentioned under "Risks". Therefore there is a high risk overall that budget pressures imposed on this Council by the awaited government funding settlement will mean that the Strategy cannot be achieved. We will have to wait and see what other pressures are made on the Council's budget from other service areas before we commit to supporting the Actions. Our comments that follow assume that Actions can and will be fully funded.

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10. We are unsure what "proactively engage with developers" means, both as regards delivery of new homes and in providing advice on the "removing unnecessary burdens" mentioned. Whilst success in this going forward will be measurable, we note the average number of new homes per year since 2001 (376) compares badly with the target of 525 and even worse with the likely increase to nearer 600 per year. We need to know more about the action[s] by Housing & Planning Services proposed to boost this number.
11. Similarly, "a Council-owned housing company" sounds like a good idea but it is unclear how it will manage to deliver more private and affordable rented accommodation for residents, or whether the homes acquired are in the current stock or newly built future stock. We need to see details of a business case.
12. Past experience of attempts to prioritise homes for "key workers" is not good, largely because it stigmatises those who apply. It is only because the housing market is flawed that this is needed. In a properly functioning housing market, anyone who really needs a home and is in full-time paid work – let alone professionally qualified - should not have to be processed through our Allocations Policy. Also a breadwinner who is a "key worker" now may not be in a few years while the economy is going through rapid change: then what happens?

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13. We would like to see the stock condition survey include data on the kind of landlord owning the poorer quality homes. We suspect that the smaller buy-to-let ‘amateur’ landlord, whose numbers have grown in recent years, will prove to account for a large share of these.
14. We support measures to accredit landlords because we believe many lack the skills needed to fulfil the landlord service and own these properties purely as investments, to the detriment of their occupants and the quality of our housing stock and the built environment. As Housing Authority, we should ensure that the “professional landlord” role and status is enhanced. Whilst the PPP may be the best way of achieving this, it seems to have little member oversight and insufficient resources.
15. All the above comments on the Delivery Plan relate to a very wide-ranging Priority 1. On Priority 2 (preventing homelessness), we believe there is unlikely to ever be support for this from the traditional private sector development industry because they will see the provision of accommodation for homeless people to be a serious drag on the profitability of any nearby market properties, unless it is just a short-term measure using properties they intend to demolish. However we agree that the private sector, in the form of local businesses other than developers, might help provide support services. We broadly support the measures in the recently agreed Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
16. Returning to the point we made in our first paragraph, there is no mention of heating costs in the Strategy, despite the featured statistic on page 7 that housing accounts for 18% of the District’s carbon emissions and the recent declaration of a Climate Emergency. Whilst it may be Environment Board that is responsible for achieving carbon reduction targets overall, we regard this as a serious omission in the Housing Strategy. “Affordable” housing must be affordable to heat, particularly for those on low incomes or vulnerable for other reasons. The Housing Service needs to give a high priority to tackling fuel poverty, which is very often associated with poor quality housing.
17. We cannot assume from what we read in this draft Strategy that the Service is sufficiently involved in carbon reduction efforts. We trust that the housing stock survey will identify which properties exhibit poor insulation but we need to see what measures are going to be taken to improve it. This is probably most urgent with private rented accommodation, which we suspect has the worst performance.
18. Specific measures should include lobbying for Government support to the Local Energy Bill, proposed at Full Council recently, which would give local councils and our communities the “power to power” themselves by being able to purchase energy outside of the national market and greater control over the rate at which homes are converted to both renewably sourced electricity and from carbon fuel for heating and cooking. Renewable is also becoming cheaper than carbon sourced energy and we need to be more ambitious in our drive to cut carbon emissions. We cannot ignore the housing sector and we ought to be proactive in this.

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19. Finally we found it a hard document to navigate and we are sure that it would be extremely hard for a lay person to understand and follow. We have just been sent the response of Paula Saunderson with comments on this aspect among others, regarding the layout and format of the document. We agree wholeheartedly with her comments.