

Progress Report 2018/2019

Background

Colchester's Housing Strategy 2015-20 was adopted in March 2015. The 5 year Strategy and Delivery Plan was developed by the Housing Strategy Partnership which includes Colchester Borough Council (CBC) and its Partner Organisations.

The Housing Strategy sets out the Council's ambitions for housing in Colchester over 5 years and puts in place objectives, targets and policies that explain how it will play a leading role to:

- Assess and plan for current and future housing needs of the local population.
- Make the best use of existing housing stock.
- Plan and facilitate new supply.
- Plan and commission housing support services which link homes to support and other services that people need to live in them.
- Help create working partnerships that secure effective housing and neighbourhood management.

The aims and objectives of the strategy will be achieved through the implementation of a Delivery Plan, working closely with a wide range of partners to achieve the vision for housing in Colchester.

The following **key priorities** were identified for the Housing Strategy:

- Maximise the supply of housing to meet local needs.
- Work with partners and residents to create mixed communities which are economically, environmentally and socially healthy and resilient.
- Prevent homelessness and rough sleeping
- Improve the life chances of Colchester's residents including their Health and Wellbeing.
- Work with customers to help them make informed choices about their housing options.
- Make the best use of existing homes.
- Work to ensure that existing and new homes are healthy, safe and energy efficient.
- Ensure that housing and related services meet a range of specialist needs.

Progress in 2018/2019

This Housing Strategy Progress Report contains some highlights of the actions in the Strategy that have been achieved or progressed in the fourth year of the strategy.

The Delivery Plan, which sets out the actions to deliver the priorities, has also been updated (*see separate document*).

Priority 1: Maximise the supply of housing to meet local needs

Priority 1 Action: *Maximise the supply of affordable housing on new developments.*

Progress:

- Affordable housing was secured on all qualifying sites, except for one where viability was considered, and a viability review mechanism was put in place to ensure that affordable housing can be captured through affordable housing commuted sums if the scheme generates a higher return than expected.
- 110 newbuild affordable homes completed in 2018/19. This brings the 3-year total to 448 new homes.

Priority 1 Action: *Maximise the use of the Council's land and assets to deliver new housing.*

Progress:

- Amphora Homes continue to progress the development of the 4 sites with a planning application submitted for one of the sites.
- With the removal of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap in 2018/2019, work has begun on "Phase 2 Garage Sites" and "Airspace" projects and both are undergoing feasibility work both of which will deliver new affordable housing using the Council's land and assets to deliver new housing.

Priority 1 Action: *Increase the role of the private rented sector in meeting housing need.*

Progress: A new incentive package to encourage Private Sector Landlords to rent to homeless households, known as Homestep was launched. A total of 57 were households were rehoused into suitable private rented homes as a result of this new scheme.

Priority 2: Work with partners and residents to create mixed communities which are economically, environmentally and socially healthy and resilient

Priority 2 Action: *Deliver quality neighbourhoods with adequate infrastructure*

Progress: During 2018/2019, CBC received s106 contributions of £2,019,584 for projects to mitigate the impact of developments which included: -

- *Contribution to Public Open Space* - £1,166,146 received for site specific projects with the Borough.
- *Community Facilities* - £432,426 received for projects including the community centre provided within the Colchester Northern Growth Area; expansion of the community centre located within the development at the former Severalls Hospital site; improvements to the Lakelands Community Centre; equipping the proposed new Stanway Community Hall.
- *Affordable Housing Contribution* - £178,922 where affordable housing was not provided on-site.
- *Public Realm* - £20,866 for maintenance and improvements of St. Nicholas Square.
- *Highways Transportation Contribution* - £61,805 to be used towards improving the safety and security of a walking route from Hawkins Road to the University of Essex and the resurfacing, lighting and provision of security at a route adjacent to the Old Custom House.

- Student Travel Plan - £82,408 received for Student Travel Projects.
- Footpath Improvements - £77,000 towards improvements to the Rowhedge Trail

Priority 2 Action: *Create neighbourhoods and communities which are sustainable*

Progress: CBC Community Enabling Officers took part in 3 “Street Weeks” lead by Essex Police, working with external partners and engaging with residents.

All of the events included a community consultation prior to the event, in which local communities/neighbourhoods were engaged with and asked to identify issues, which were then tackled during the week-long events.

Town Centre multi agency partnership “Team ten” was formed to reduce incidence of ASB and nuisance in Town Centre. Weekly briefings held with partners to agree approach with support and enforcement in place to resolve issues arising. Overarching Town Centre Action Plan initiated to deliver a multi-agency approach to tackling ASB within the Town Centre

Local Community Meetings (multi agency problem solving groups) continue to work alongside local communities to address crime, anti-social behaviour and quality of life issues. Currently chaired by Police, 12 meetings took place across the borough during 2018/19.

Priority 3: Prevent homelessness and rough sleeping

Priority 3 Action: *The actions set out in the Homelessness Strategy Delivery plan monitored and updated annually.*

Progress: The Homelessness Strategy delivery plan was updated in conjunction with the project group. A progress report was produced, shared with partners and published on the CBC website.

Priority 3 Action *Ensure we are best placed to respond to the new duties placed on local authorities as a result of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.*

Progress: The Homelessness Reduction Act continues to be implemented, with CBH having delegated responsibility for the delivery of the Homelessness and Housing Options service. Actions completed in 2018/2019 include:

- The provision of a Housing Options wizard website to provide advice and guidance to those who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Completion of 744 Personal Housing Plans.
- Reduction in homelessness acceptances of 37.5% compared to the previous year.
- Action was taken to prevent and relive homelessness for another 276 households.

Priority 4: Work in partnership to improve the life chances of Colchester's residents, including their health and wellbeing.

Priority 4 Action: *Improve health & wellbeing of Colchester residents through greater integration of housing, health and social care services.*

Progress: There was significant progress in this area in 2018/2019 including:

- CBH developed a secondment for a mental health social worker, which is developing improved communication; pathways and assessments for people with a mental health issue who are threatened with homelessness.
- Funding through Sport England Local Delivery Pilot is being used to lever in system wide funding and to test and learn what will work in connecting residents with their communities and improving health through decreasing inactivity.
- Partnerships with Catch 22 housing intervention project, have led to them incorporate health and wellbeing interventions such as walk & talk sessions and connecting families to their local communities in a bid to decrease inactivity and improve health as part of their homelessness prevention work.
- Work undertaken to encourage adoption of Livewell campaign by NEE Alliance in promoting health and wellbeing and prevention across the acute and health and social care sectors
- The Health and Housing Project has worked with a wide range of partners including within health, social care and the community. Raised awareness of the work of the Private Sector Housing team (PSHT) and provided shadowing opportunities to colleagues from other services. Referral pathways into the services provided by the PSHT have been set up.
- More than 300 serious housing hazards have been removed from homes in the private sector through the work of the Private Sector Housing team, including over 50 Category 1 hazards.

Priority 4 Action: *Reduce fuel poverty in the borough.*

Progress: A number of actions and projects were implemented in 2018/2019 including:

- CBH reviewed homes where energy rating was below expectation to implement "warm homes" insulation and heating survey.
- CBH Financial Inclusion team actively supported tenants to make better choices in their utility tariff and to use energy efficiently.
- Affordable warmth assistance was provided by CBC to fuel poor and low-income households that are vulnerable to the effects of the cold provided through promotion of services via companies, CBC Facebook page and elected members. This resulted in 30 ECO Flex declarations made, 22 installations completed with 14 residents getting full funding.
- More than 50 homes in the private rented and owner occupied sector had Category 1 and Category 2 Excess Cold hazards removed through a combination of informal and formal enforcement action and the provision of discretionary housing assistance.

Priority 5: Work with customers to help them make informed choices about their housing options

Priority 5 Action: *Support residents affected by Welfare Reform*

Progress: The CBC Customer Support Team continues to engage with customers affected by welfare reforms. Customers are invited for an interview to discuss their situation and provide advice regarding welfare benefits, employment, housing, debts to minimize the effect of the welfare reforms and reduce reliance on discretionary funds and prevent homelessness.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) were used to support residents affected by Welfare Reforms and to remove risk of homelessness. The DHP fund of £444,224 (including £50,000 from CBC) was fully spent in 2018/19.

A total of £71,003.32 was spent to support residents affected by the Benefit Cap. A further £88,219.72 was spent to support residents affected by the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

More than £15,000 of Exceptional Hardship Payments were utilised to support customers in managing their Council Tax accounts.

Our Community Support Employment Officer (CSEO) supported residents with transition over to Universal Credit (UC) and assisted with complex UC issues that arose in the process, working closely with the JCP and CBC. CSEO works from the JCP three days a week and refers customers over to the Customer Support Team for other welfare benefit related enquiries where relevant.

CBH Financial Inclusion team (FIT) supported 367 tenants with transition to Universal Credit. CBH also applied for 113 Discretionary Housing payment awards and gave grant funding to Citizens Advice who supported 25 residents in significant debt through home visits. Benefit cap cases for CBC tenants were reduced to 33 households through proactive support with tenants. CBH also provided Welfare Benefit advice to 205 residents with additional benefit awarded in excess of £200k in 2018/2019.

Priority 5 Action: *Improve tenancy sustainment and work proactively with residents to provide advice and assistance around budgeting, work and debts*

Progress: Pre-tenancy workshops held regularly through the year for housing register applicants aged 25 and under. This produced excellent results with no tenant under 25 years old evicted in 2018/2019, following process to attend pre-tenancy workshop, introductory reviews and accept tenancy support.

Financial resilience has been encouraged and supported through Money advice outreach work and training sessions.

Priority 6: Make the best use of existing homes

Priority 6 Action: *Maximise the use of council homes and reduce under-occupation*

Progress: Progress continues to ensure we make best use of Council homes including:

- Tenancy Audit programme completed with all CBH tenants visited. 24 households moved to smaller accommodation in 2018/2019 with support of the Tenant Incentive to Move Scheme

- Households under-occupying council homes and in receipt housing benefit was reduced to 225.
- 5-Year investment plan in place to maintain the Colchester Sheltered Housing Standard where appropriate. Review of those schemes not meeting the standard restarted in March 2019.
- Sheltered housing vacancies reduced following programme to improve quality of CBC sheltered housing stock. Maytree Court sheltered scheme sold by CBC during 2018/19. At year end 99% of the sheltered housing stock was occupied (6 vacancies, with no vacancy more than 3 weeks) and turnover of sheltered housing reduced to 10% of stock in 2018/2019.

Priority Action: *Help people whose independence may be at risk to remain in or return to their home in both the private and public sector properties.*

Progress: A number of actions have been completed which contribute to meeting this priority including:

- The budget for adaptations to council properties was increased to £200,000 in 2018/19 to meet demand from council tenants. £53k spent on minor adaptations such as grab rails, access aids and ramps. £720k spent on more significant adaptations such as level access showers, stairlifts and hoists. £52k was spent on one major adaptation which was a property extension.
- Arrangements are in place for a Senior Occupational Therapist to be seconded into the Healthy Homes team from ECC in 2019/2020 for a one-year project to work on fast tracking adaptations.
- 62 Disabled Facilities Grants completed in 2018 -19 to enable people with disabilities to remain living independently in their own homes for longer.
- Welfare Benefit Specialist (WBS) provides complex welfare benefit support for working and pension age customers in the borough. This includes claiming Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Attendance Allowance (AA), Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and other benefits. WBS also assists customers with Mandatory Reconsiderations and Appeals to ensure they are fairly supported in Court.

Priority 7: Work to ensure that existing and new homes are healthy, safe and energy efficient

Priority 7 Action: *Encourage private landlords & managing agents to provide good quality and well managed properties*

Progress: The Private Sector Housing Team carried out over 500 inspections/visits/assessments of properties in the private sector. Over 300 serious housing hazards were removed from 80 plus properties in the private sector through a combination of informal and formal enforcement action and the provision of discretionary financial assistance.

7 prosecution cases taken against non-compliant landlords and property management companies.

In 2018/2019, CBC were the first local authority in the country to prosecute a property guardian company for non-compliance with legal requirements.

Priority 7 Action: *Improve the energy efficiency of the Council's housing stock*

Progress: Average SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure - the government's recommended method system for measuring the energy rating of residential dwellings) rating of CBC's housing (73.86) exceeded target set for 2019. Work continues to complete loft and cavity wall fill within the stock with access issues hampering full stock completion.

Government incentives received by installing Air Source Heat Pumps in rural 'off-gas' properties. Ground Source Heat Pump installed in Harrison Court to provide heating and hot water, replacing previous ageing gas boilers.

45% of the Council Housing Stock now with Photo Voltaic panels. Government incentives reduced to a level whereby investors are not investing any longer. CBH continue to look for opportunities including specifying PV in the Council's New Build programme.

Priority 8: Ensure that housing and related services meet a range of specialist needs

Priority 8 Action: *Work in partnership with other providers to ensure a sufficient supply of housing for older people including extra care.*

Progress: Winnocks and Kendalls Almshouse Charity started on site on Military Road during 2018/2019. The project will complete in 2019/2020, delivering 9 affordable homes for older people with grant support from Colchester Borough Council.

Work started to prepare two extra-care schemes for Colchester working with ECC and a registered provider (RP) on one scheme and a private developer and RP on another scheme. The second scheme did not come to fruition. Work continues on the first scheme. Work began by a private developer to build 48 "retirement living plus" market homes with 24-hour staffing.

Priority 8 Action: *Identify and support the need for adapted properties as part of new developments*

Progress: In 2018/2019 there was regular consultation with CBH and better use of data from Housing Register applications to robustly evidence the need for wheelchair adapted and accessible housing. Wheelchair adapted affordable homes to meet Part M4 Cat 3 are requested on new developments where the design makes this possible.

In 2018/2019, one 2-bedroom wheelchair bungalow was delivered to meet Part M4 Cat 3 (2) (a)

It has been proposed in the emerging local plan that 5% of affordable homes will meet Part M4 Cat 3 (2) (b). If adopted this will significantly increase the provision of accessible and wheelchair adapted homes.

To date, a further 15 wheelchair homes to meet Part M4 Cat 3 (2) (a) and/or (2) (b) have been requested at Development Team, but delivery will depend on further negotiations if the planning applications progress.