

### Progress Report 2025

#### Background

Local Authorities are required to have a Housing Strategy, setting out their vision for housing in the local area and providing an overarching framework for policies and plans. The Housing Strategy is a key strategic document for the Local Authority and recognises the importance of a safe and affordable home in ensuring healthy lives and providing equal access to life opportunities.

The current Housing Strategy was adopted in July 2022. It sets out our ambitions for housing in Colchester over a five-year period and describes what the Council and its partners (in both the public and private sector) will do to help address the key housing issues and challenges facing the residents of Colchester.

#### The Housing Strategy 2022-27

The overarching vision for the strategy is:

***‘Colchester, where all residents have access to a safe and affordable home that promotes health and equality, in a sustainable community’.***

To achieve this vision, 4 key priorities were agreed:

- **Supply** – ‘We will increase the supply of quality affordable homes’
- **Sustainability and Community** – ‘We will support people to maintain their homes and build sustainable communities’
- **Structure** – ‘We will reduce carbon emissions from homes and improve quality and standards’
- **Prevent Homelessness** – ‘We will prevent homelessness by working with partners to deliver Colchester’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy’

The preceding Housing Strategy Delivery Plan Update & Progress Report (for 2023-24) can be found [here](#).

Colchester’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 and its associated Delivery Plan are separate documents that sit under the Housing Strategy. The latest Progress Report (2025) and Delivery Plan Update (2024-25) can be found [here](#).

#### Update

This Housing Strategy Progress Report 2025 contains a selection of highlights from the actions in the Delivery Plan of the Strategy that have been achieved or progressed during 2024-25.

The Delivery Plan which sets out the actions to deliver the aims of the Strategy contains a complete update and is included as an addendum.

## Priority 1: 'We will increase the supply of quality affordable homes'

### Challenge

Work in partnership with Developers and Housing Associations to maximise the supply of affordable housing on new developments

### Actions

Continue to purchase ex local authority properties through the Acquisition programme (using right to buy receipts) to increase the supply of affordable housing

### Progress

During 2024-25, a total of 128 affordable homes were delivered including: Registered Providers via S106 Affordable rented and shared ownership = 69 homes & Colchester City Council (CCC) New Build and Acquisition Programme = 59 homes.

CCC purchased (or "acquired"), using HRA funding and RTB receipts, a total of 27 properties within the 2024-25 financial year. These included: 4 x 1 bed flats, 17 x 3 bed houses, 2 x 4 bed houses and 4 x 2 bed flats/maisonettes.

The tenure totals for 2024-25 were:

Social Rent - 15

Affordable Rent - 91

Shared Ownership - 18

Sheltered Housing - 4

### Challenge

Maximise the use of the Council's land and assets to deliver new housing

### Actions

Delivery of new housing on Council owned sites to increase housing.

In 2019 the Council committed to deliver 350 additional social homes owned by the Council over 5 years.

The Council's HRA newbuild developments are designed to meet the "Future Homes 2025" standard (option 2) principles to achieve a 31% carbon saving.

### Progress

CCC was able to meet the 350 additional council homes target by 2025 (through Acquisition buy-backs, new build acquisitions and new build developments on underused garage sites). As part of the review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), Cabinet agreed a delivery target of 290 Council homes by 2030.

Phase 3 of garage sites delivered a mix of unit sizes; 2 bed houses were allocated to applicants downsizing, and 4 x wheelchair accessible bungalows were delivered.

32 homes were delivered during 2024-25 through the Council's new build programme including new build acquisition properties directly from developers.

### Challenge

Maximise the use of council homes and reduce under-occupation

### Actions

Implement revised tenant incentive scheme policy to encourage council tenants who are under-occupying to move to a home that better meets their needs.

Promote the use of mutual exchange to better meet tenant's housing needs.

Maximise take-up of sheltered housing through the major refurbishment programme to free up under-occupied properties.

### Progress

Through the Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) tenancy audit programme, occupation levels are checked and discussed with households. Options with regards to the Transfer Incentive Scheme (TIS), and downsizing to an Older Persons Service scheme are discussed where appropriate.

The redevelopment of Elfreda House saw under-occupied family homes being made available, and enabled occupants to move into accommodation that better met their needs.

CBH processed 42 TIS moves, and completed 39 Mutual Exchanges during 2024-25.

Through the work of the CBH Financial Inclusion team, there has been a reduction in the number of tenants on Housing Benefit and those affected by the under-occupation bedroom tax (from 116 to 62)

### Challenge

Work in partnership with ECC and other providers to ensure a sufficient supply of housing for older people, including extra care

### Actions

Work with ECC to identify funding available and delivery options.

Use information available to identify the needs and aspirations of older people, where they want to live, and what type of accommodation.

### Progress

CCC Housing Strategy Team and CBH continue to work with ECC on the new Extra Care scheme on the old Lexden Springs School Site. The scheme will provide 60 apartments with support for people over 55, with a local connection to Colchester.

ECC commissioned a research project through the Housing LIN (Housing Learning and Improvement Network) to look specifically at the housing needs of people that required support through Adult Social Care. The report, will provide information on the demand and need for older persons accommodation across Essex.

## Challenge

Understand and identify housing needs in terms of number, size, tenure, quality of properties and associated facilities.

## Actions

Clearly set out the level of housing required in the city to meet housing need and demand through an Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) figure, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework

## Progress

The Objectively Assessed Housing Need for Colchester, as set out in the adopted Local Plan, is 920 new dwellings per year or 14,720 new homes over the plan period between 2017 and 2033.

Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) were published in December 2024 including the reintroduction of mandatory housing targets and revision to the Standard Method for calculating housing need. The requirement for Colchester is confirmed as 1,300 dwellings per year. For the Plan period to 2041, the updated figure of 1,300 per year equates to an overall housing need of 20,800 homes.

Local Plan Policy DM10: Housing Diversity recognises that housing developments must provide a range of housing types that can accommodate a range of different households, including families, single persons, older persons, those with care and/or support needs, and low-income households.

A Local Housing Needs Assessment was commissioned by the CCC Planning Team and published in November 2024. The report provides valuable insight into the Housing need across Colchester, which will be used to evidence the required need for tenure types and size of affordable housing on developments

## Priority 2: Sustainability and Community – ‘We will support people to maintain their homes

### Challenge

Improve tenancy sustainment and work proactively with residents to provide advice and assistance around budgeting, work and debts

### Actions

Promote pre-tenancy workshops/early intervention for arrears.

Promote financial Inclusion to help tenants to budget and provide long term improvements for residents in financial difficulty and reduce long term dependency on discretionary funds.

Work with ECC to identify how commissioned services such as the Housing Related Support Floating Support Service and Phoenix Futures can work better with Colchester tenants and landlords alike, supporting households at risk/reducing evictions and building positive relationships between landlords and tenants.

### Progress

The CBH tenancy audit programme has continued to identify households in need of support, with 205 households being referred on to the Financial Inclusion Team.

CBH has also signed up to the Frontline App, which offers a database of all localised services that can be accessed by professionals and clients to identify and refer into community support.

The Community Initiative fund has continued to provide essential funding to local community groups that support those affected by the cost-of-living crisis. Over £40k was distributed during 2024/25.

CBH Welfare Rights Officer had 85 referrals, and obtained £262,000 in additional benefits for Council tenants during 2024/25.

### Challenge

Create neighbourhoods and communities which are sustainable

### Actions

Develop partnerships with residents, the voluntary sector, community organisations and wider local service providers, especially on new housing schemes/developments.

Work in partnership with the Community Police to implement new legislation from the ASB Police and Crime Act and undertake enforcement action as necessary.

Introduce a co-ordinated approach to community engagement with voluntary sector and housing providers.

### Progress

CBH has continued to engage with partners to address issues with crime and ASB affecting communities. Alongside bi-monthly tasking meetings, these include:

- CSP (Community Safety Partnership)
- Community Safety Delivery Board

CBH has developed its new Neighbourhood Toolkit, which is designed to empower those affected by nuisance behaviours or ASB. It enables them to identify ways to go about resolving local issues, allowing limited resources to focus on more serious cases.

Officers from Essex Police have begun working from the Greenstead housing office once a week, to develop local partnership working.

## Priority 3: Structure – ‘We will reduce carbon emissions from homes and improve standards’

### Challenge

Reduce Carbon emissions in new and existing homes by 2027

Improvement in the energy efficiency of the Council's housing stock and ensure that Council properties are thermally efficient

### Action

Identify funding opportunities and schemes to help reduce carbon emissions from new and existing homes

Increase in homes that are more energy efficient.

### Progress

Through various programmes of work, the CCC Client Team have reduced emissions in existing Council Properties.

Since 2021, CO2 emissions from heating have decreased by 105kg per property per year across the stock. Properties currently emit an average of 12kg less CO2 annually than benchmarked organisations (source: Coality Portfolio Software)

CBH Asset Management monitor the proportion of properties with an EPC rating 'C' or above. In 2023/24 - 86% of properties achieved EPC 'C'.

Currently, 89% of stock achieves EPC 'C'.

### Challenge

Ensure that houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) are safe and well managed

### Action

Ensure HMOs are managed in accordance with the Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006 & 2007

Undertake statutory duty to license all mandatory HMOs under the provisions of the Housing Act 2004 Part 2

### Progress

Through the work of the CCC Private Sector Housing team in 2024/25:

- 135 visits/inspections were made of HMOs
- 71 HMO Licences were issued with those HMOs all ensured to meet required standards.
- 114 HMOs were improved.
- 13 HMO licences revoked.

### Challenge

Reduce levels of overcrowding in affordable housing

### Action

Promote the use of mutual exchange, to better meet tenants needs

### Progress

CBH have processed 42 Tenant Incentive Scheme (TIS) moves, and completed 39 Mutual Exchanges through the House Exchange scheme.