

Housing & Homeless Strategy 2018-2022



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Foreword

We are very fortunate to live in an affluent and attractive part of rural Essex. Rochford is desirable and people want to come here to live. We have miles of coastline, beautiful countryside and yet it takes less than an hour to reach central London by the direct trainline. As a result, we have high prices and an affordability challenge. Our average house prices are more than 10 times local earnings and as such, we know that many people cannot afford to buy their first home.

Local families at the bottom of the income scale face an even bigger challenge in finding accommodation that is affordable to them. Compared to the national average, we have fewer housing association and privately rented properties and there is a continuing demand for our homelessness services. The Homelessness Reduction Act has since come into force (on 3 April 2018) and this places additional duties on us to prevent homelessness and support those who are homeless to find appropriate accommodation.

Our population is ageing. Whilst longevity is something to celebrate, it also presents us with a challenge as we anticipate increased demand for our preventative housing solutions including extra care, adaptations and housing related support.

All of this, means that Rochford District Council and its housing partners, are under pressure to deliver on the housing agenda. The government's new standard assessment of housing need suggests Rochford must deliver a minimum of 362 dwellings per annum over up to 2026 and this means our Joint Strategic Plan and forthcoming Local Plan will need to carefully consider local supply and affordability issues. We need to take a stance that is 'pro-growth' and channel our resources and energies into supporting the sensitive and responsible growth of the district. Our work with partners on the Joint Strategic Plan, reinforces this and will demonstrate how growth across the wider area will be delivered.

One of our biggest challenges is the delivery of new affordable homes and assessments have identified a need for 238 affordable homes per year within our District. At the current time, our trajectory shows an upward curve of new affordable homes which will help us to deliver on our new duties towards homeless families as well as to local people in employment who seek low cost home ownership options, however there is more to do and we therefore need to revise our approach and align our resources to help deliver the housing growth challenge.

We have good working relationships with the partners who help to implement this Strategy and I look forward to celebrating future achievements as we all progress with our Housing & Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.



Shaun Scrutton – Managing Director

1. Introduction and Key Messages

This Housing & Homelessness Strategy for Rochford sets out the housing issues facing the district and the Council's plan to work in partnership to meet its housing objectives. The document covers the period 2018-2022 but will be regularly reviewed. Progress against its action plan will be reported to Council Members.

This strategy also shares the aims of the new partnership vision of the County i.e. The Future of Essex, where every single person has the support and the opportunity to fulfil the promise of their potential, particularly in the ambitions to strengthen communities through participation.

The Key Housing Priorities of this Strategy are:

Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To support the delivery of appropriate housing growth in Rochford District• To use all available resources to deliver affordable housing to meet needs
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To meet housing needs and reduce homelessness in partnership• To meet the needs of our ageing population and other vulnerable groups
Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To raise standards of housing management and property conditions in the private sector, especially those that have an impact on health• To maximise the use of existing private housing stock including empty homes• To prevent homelessness from the private rented sector• To maximise the use of existing homes with housing associations
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To work in partnership to achieve our housing objectives, and channel internal and external resources to deliver this Strategy.

2. National Housing Policies and their Impact

2.1 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (the “2017 Act”) places new legal duties on English local authorities, so that anybody who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless has access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status; as long as they are eligible for housing assistance.

The 2017 Act largely amends part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and is the biggest change to homelessness legislation in recent years. It has modified and extended homelessness protection in a number of key ways:

- Improved advice and information about homelessness and prevention of homelessness
- Extension of the period of ‘threatened with homelessness’, from 28 to 56 days.
- New duties to prevent and relieve homelessness, regardless of priority need and intentionality.
- Introduction of new personalised housing plans, setting out the actions both authorities and individuals will take to secure accommodation.
- Introduction of a new ‘duty to refer’ from other statutory bodies which came into force in October 2018.

2.2 Fixing the Broken Housing Market – Government’s White Paper

The Housing White Paper, *fixing our broken housing market* (February 2017) described several initiatives which aimed to secure a step-change in housing supply. It set out the Government’s plans which were updated in 2018, to boost new housing supply; speed up the delivery of new homes; help aspiring homeowners; and tackle the shortage of affordable housing. With a sharp focus on the delivery of new housing, Government expects local authorities to be ambitious and innovative in seeking to meet their objectively assessed need for housing. A national target to build 300,000 new homes a year was subsequently set in the Budget 2017.

2.3 Changes to National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

In July 2018 Government published changes to the NPPF. One of the key changes is a chapter on delivering a sufficient supply of homes, where there are new important policies. These include requirements for local authorities to use a standardised methodology for the calculation of local housing need; to undertake a Housing Delivery Test to measure performance and set out actions to boost delivery where necessary and for 10% of the local housing requirement to be met by small and medium sites. The affordable homes definition has changed to include discount market sales housing or other routes to home ownership and there is a minimum 10% requirement for affordable homeownership on major sites.

2.4 Housing and Planning Act 2016

This Act (the “2016 Act”) contained numerous legislative changes to housing policy including:

- **Introduction of Starter Homes** – a new product to build homes sold at 80% of market prices. There is a cap at £250,000 for homes sold in England and £450,000 for London. The intention in the 2016 Act was for a proportion of new affordable homes to be ‘starter homes’ but this has been hotly debated and the secondary legislation to bring this into force is still awaited.
- **Extension of Right to Buy** - the Government has committed to extend the Right to Buy to assured tenants of housing associations on a voluntary basis and associations will be required to replace homes on a ‘one for one’ basis, which will be particularly important in rural areas where there is less affordable housing.
- A large regional pilot scheme in the Midlands was launched in August 2018 and the Government has said that the impact of the pilot will be assessed before decisions are made on the next steps.
- **Tackling Rogue Landlords** – the 2016 Act introduced various measures to improve standards in the private rented sector by tackling rogue landlords. These include introducing civil penalties of up to £30,000; rent repayment orders; banning orders and a database of rogue landlords.
- Other recent changes in the private housing sector includes a Tenant Fees Bill which stamps out letting agents’ fees and capping deposits and introduced in October 2018 was the extension of mandatory House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing regime, including minimum room sizes and a specification of the maximum number of people the HMO should house.
- **End of Lifetime Tenancies** – the 2016 Act contains provisions which would limit social housing provider’s ability to offer longer-term tenancies in certain circumstances. The aim being to make best use of the housing stock by offering short term tenancies to people in need, with periodic reviews to ensure the household still requires the size of accommodation they are occupying. The Government has said that these provisions will not be implemented ‘at this time’ and no details to date have been released.
- **Self-build and custom-built housing** - political aspirations are to increase the proportion of self-build and custom-built housing. Local authorities are required to hold a register of applicants who are interested in self and custom build housing and to allocate appropriate sites through the planning system¹.

¹ <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/self-build-and-custom-build-register>

As of 31 March 2018, there were 51 individuals recorded on the Rochford Council's register.

2.5 Government Changes to Delivery Agencies

In 2017 Government changed the main delivery agencies for housing. The Government department was renamed 'Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government' raising the profile of housing delivery. A new Minister for Homelessness was created. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) was disbanded and 'Homes England' was established to oversee housing growth and infrastructure, and the 'Regulator of Social Housing' was established. These changes emphasise the importance of housing growth.

2.6 Welfare Reform

Major changes to the benefits system have come into force in the last few years, including the Benefit Cap, Personalised Independence Payment, the bedroom tax and the roll out of Universal Credit.

This continues to impact on households in the District with Universal Credit having come into operation in full in July 2018. This, along with the Benefit Cap provides significant challenges for many families in the District due to high housing costs. Welfare reforms are set to continue with the Government continuing to promote its 'better off in work' policy.

2.7 Care Act 2016 and Better Care Fund

The Care Act 2016 requires local social services authorities to carry out a needs assessment in order to determine whether an adult has needs for care and support, it also supports closer working between health, housing and social care services. From 2015/16 onwards the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) allocation has been included within the Better Care Fund (BCF).

The BCF created a pooled budget in each local authority area to encourage health, social care and other related services to work more closely together. The inclusion of the DFG allocation is intended to recognise the vital role that the home plays in helping people to remain healthy and independent.

The Government has increased the amount given to local authorities significantly over the last few years, with the expectation that local areas will be more flexible in how the money is spent. Wider health and social care priority health outcomes such as delayed transfers of care and readmission to hospital can be supported using some of the DFG capital allocation.

2.8 Social Housing Green Paper 2018 onwards

This green paper '*A new deal for social housing*' was published August 2018 and seeks views on the governments vision for social housing providing safe, decent, well managed homes. The paper outlines 5 principles which underpin the new 'deal':

1. Ensuring homes are safe and decent
 - Emphasis on safety follows the review of the Grenfell Tower fire. It calls for a review of the Decent Homes Standard and compares measures applied to private landlords.
2. Effective resolution of complaints.
3. Empowering residents – holding landlords to account.
4. Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
5. Expanding supply and supporting home ownership
 - The local government association have commented on this paper being only a small step towards delivering more social homes, compared with the immediate need for high numbers of new affordable homes.

The Government's action plan and timetable for implementing reforms of social housing, as set out in its green paper, has yet to be published. The Prime Minister in June 2018 said that the action plan would include *"the creation of a stronger consumer regulation regime for social housing, enhancing tenants' rights and making it easier to enforce them; changes to the way complaints are resolved, so that tenants know exactly how to raise concerns and can be confident their voices will be heard and acted on; empowering residents still further by requiring landlords to demonstrate how they have engaged with their tenants; and a commitment to further boost the supply of high-quality social housing through the Affordable Homes Programme and other funding."*

The potential impact on the District will be kept under review. In the meantime, the Essex Housing Officers Group work together to provide a joined-up response to this green paper, as their own collective 'offer for tenants'.

3 Our Corporate Context, Partnerships and Links to Other Strategies

3.1 Corporate Vision:

“Working to help you shape your future”

3.2 Business Plan 2019-2023

The Council’s 4 Priorities are:

1. Being Financially Sustainable
2. Early Intervention
3. Maximise our Assets
4. Enable Communities

In its broad sense ‘housing’ fits with all these priorities, but it is specifically mentioned under Early Intervention: *“We will work to meet future housing need for all”*

3.3 Capital Assets Investment Strategy

In May 2018 the Council established a Member Working Party to develop a Capital Assets Investment Strategy. This strategy sets out the Council’s capital investment priorities with consideration of financial return and non-financial, strategic objectives (such as place-shaping), considering stakeholder perspectives and the Council’s corporate Business Plan.

The Council has a varied portfolio of assets (both land and property), predominantly centred around Rochford and Rayleigh town centres with various smaller assets spread across the District. The development potential of all these sites is now being assessed. The Council’s Capital Asset Strategy provides a framework under which a balanced portfolio of projects is to be delivered within the Council’s risk appetite and available resources. The aim is for projects to contribute to the overall financial sustainability and wider business plan objectives of the Council in future years and this gives an opportunity for the Council to consider its community leadership role including how it might deliver on wider regeneration objectives in the long term.

3.4 Economic Growth Strategy

The Economic Growth Strategy 2017 sets out the economic strengths of the District including the thriving regional airport, easy access to London, transport links, unemployment, highly skilled resident population, and a new business park. Challenges for the local economy include the ageing population, a skills / labour mismatch, and lack of employment space. The Strategy sets four priorities for the future growth of the District:

1. Encouraging inward investment
2. Growing and retaining businesses
3. Developing skills and employment
4. Supporting new businesses

The development of new housing to support population growth will be key to the future economic success of the District.

3.5 **Local Plan**

The Council's Core Strategy was adopted in December 2011 and was subsequently assessed for compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework. The Allocations Plan was adopted in 2014 and sets out the sites for development of 250 homes per year up to 2025. There are supporting Area Action Plans for Hockley, Rochford, Rayleigh and the airport area.

The Council is currently in the early stages of preparing a new Local Plan for the District and this will set out the Council's strategic vision, policies and land allocations, where necessary, for meeting future needs in the district to 2037.

The revised housing targets to meet the objectively assessed need which is likely to be around 362 dwellings per year.

The Council will need to work closely with its partners across South Essex to develop a realistic and deliverable approach to homes, jobs and infrastructure as part of the Duty to Co-operate. A key component of this duty is the preparation of a Statement of Common Ground which has already been prepared and agreed in July 2018 by the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA), to support the preparation of a Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) for South Essex.

3.6 **Opportunity South Essex (Thames Gateway / South Essex Growth Partnership)**

The Growth Partnership includes:

- Basildon Borough Council
- Castle Point Borough Council
- Rochford District Council
- Southend-on-Sea Council
- Thurrock Council
- Essex County Council
- Representatives of the South Essex business community.

Together with these authorities, the Council works collaboratively on strategic planning matters, co-ordinate evidence, plans and funding bids to support growth across the sub-region.

The Growth Partnership's Vision is:

'To deliver a sufficient and sustainable supply of quality housing that contributes to a balanced housing and job market.'

Priorities are:

1. New Funding Models: Viability: Evidence Base: Site Development
 - Enabling the development of high quality and sustainable affordable housing in places where people want to live, responding to local need and supporting the economy.
2. Private sector housing
 - Improving the condition and usage of existing housing across all tenures considering social and environmental factors that impact on quality of life.
3. Planning for Older People: Extra Care: Adaptations: Homeless
 - Enabling people to make informed choices about their housing circumstances and enabling them to meet their own housing needs. Develop links between health, well-being, employment and housing to help prevent homelessness and support vulnerable people.

There is a shared sub-regional Housing Manager who co-ordinates joint projects including the developer forum, the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and regular Housing Market Bulletins.

3.7 **South Essex 2050**

Building on the Growth Partnership, the Councils in South Essex, together with Brentwood Borough Council have formed an association and are working together on a shared vision for South Essex in 2050. This collaboration recognises that there are growth pressures that need to be pro-actively managed and there are benefits in partnership working at senior officer and political levels. South Essex has an ambition to improve opportunities for housing delivery, investment and growth beyond current housing needs.

To deliver the homes, jobs and infrastructure in an appropriate and deliverable way, the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) recognise the continuing need for a partnership approach not just within the area, but also with Government, to create the right conditions for this to happen and to further formalise plans for joint strategic planning and infrastructure delivery.

Agreement on the key policy themes to be supported include:

1. Place leadership, proposition and brand
2. Opening spaces for development (green infrastructure, housing and commercial)
3. Transforming transport connectivity
4. Supporting our seven sectors of industrial opportunity (advanced manufacturing, construction, environmental technologies and energy, digital and creative services, finance and business services, life sciences and healthcare, transport and logistics)
5. Shaping local labour and skills markets

6. Creating a fully digitally enabled place
7. Securing a sustainable energy supply
8. Enhancing health and social care through coordinated planning

In addition, six growth areas have been identified which have the potential to unlock business, employment and housing growth. Some of these are of national and international importance, providing transport connectivity.

The 2050 agenda recognises that these have implications that cross administrative borders and therefore provide added incentives for joint work:

1. River Thames and Estuary corridor
2. Southend airport area
3. A127 corridor
4. Cross rail connectivity
5. Lower Thames crossing and junctions
6. Purfleet, Tilbury and London Gateway port areas

New joint working arrangements at a political and executive level, have been established and the next steps are:

- to design a place proposition to promote South Essex
- to take a joined-up and strategic approach to growth and spatial planning by creating a Joint Strategic Plan
- to co-ordinate an infrastructure strategy delivering a series of game-changing initiatives.

The commitment to work together on strategic planning has been enshrined in a Memorandum of Understanding and a successful bid for Planning Delivery Grant was made attracting nearly £1m to further support this work – the second highest grant given in the country.

The Council will be a key partner in the 2050 project and support this work as a positive step in enabling the sensitive and responsible growth of the district and strategic links with Homes England with a focus on infrastructure and delivery will need to be strengthened. There must also be pro-active consideration of the Council's role in supporting the collective growth of South Essex and this could include consideration of opportunities to work in partnership with Southend Council as a strategic response to cross border issues, to help meet the need for homes, jobs and infrastructure in south east Essex.

ASELA has agreed to work on the preparation of a Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) for South Essex and a Statement of Common ground has been formally agreed by the partner authorities. The intention is for the JSP to provide a strategic framework for the preparation of local policies.

3.8 South Essex Joint Strategic Plan (JSP)

The South Essex authorities are committed to the production of JSP to help implement a vision for South Essex. This commitment was endorsed through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by all contributing authorities in February 2018.

A JSP would provide the strategic framework for the preparation of the new Local Plan, which would provide more detailed planning policies and perform an essential place-shaping role on the ground. The JSP will set out the overall housing provision, distribution and housing needs across the South Essex.

3.9 Essex Developers Group

Is a partnership of Essex Councils, landowners, enablers and developers, which has formed a forum for consultation on key policies, recently including a Planning Protocol which aims to speed up the delivery of housing through the planning process, the skills requirement for house building, and viability. This group demonstrates the ongoing interest and commitment of developers in the housing market in the District.

3.10 Homelessness Forum

A new Homelessness Forum has been established to review, monitor and implement the recommendations in this Strategy that relate to homelessness. Meetings provide an opportunity to share knowledge and experience of services and new developments between agencies. It is envisaged that regular meetings of this Forum will ensure that partnerships flourish and that key recommendations within this strategy are delivered.

3.11 Essex Vision – Essex Prevents homelessness workstream

The Future of Essex Vision has identified prevention of homelessness as a key priority and is developing a “countywide approach to homelessness reduction” in which the Council and partners will work together. The key principles are:

- Recognise those groups most at risk of homelessness to develop earlier intervention and prevention
- Improve communication and understanding between partners to reduce risks and improve outcomes for all involved, e.g. multi-agency training, pooling resources and protocols
- Open, honest, transparent services that enable people to take responsibility, make considered choices and manage expectations
- Improve the flow of information and management of cases, removing duplication and streamlining the way we work between organisations

- Improve the understanding and prioritisation of the commissioning of support services between organisations that prevent homelessness
- Tackling the perception and stigma of homelessness and affordable housing by collectively identifying need throughout Essex
- Using information to drive changes to organisational plans and lobby collectively for improvements to wider policy such as welfare reform, social care and local plans.

As a step towards achieving these aims, the Council and partners have agreed a memorandum of understanding and several actions. The responsibility for co-ordinating the delivery of these actions will lie with the Essex Vision homelessness task and finish group, which the Council are an active member of.

The areas for action have been determined based on feedback from the Essex Vision homelessness survey carried out in 2018. In some cases, work has already begun, and multi- partner discussions are continuing through the task and finish group:

- Creation of a data sharing agreement
- An Essex wide Prisoner Housing Protocol between Prisons, National Probation Service, Essex CRC, the fourteen Local Housing Authorities in Essex, and Essex County Council has been launched and monitoring of its use is now live.
- Review and relaunch of the existing Essex Homeless Families protocol
- Review and Relaunch of the existing Essex Homeless 16- and 17-year olds protocol
- Launch of a new Homelessness Hospital Discharge service in Mid and South Essex
- Launch of an annual Essex Vision forum for discussion of homelessness issues and trends, delivery of the actions and commitments in this agreement, and the agreement of new actions and commitments for the following year/s.

3.12 **Health and Wellbeing Board**

The Council is a partner to the joint Castle Point and Rochford Health & Wellbeing Board which contributes to the health and wellbeing of the residents of the District. A new Essex Health & Wellbeing Strategy was adopted in July 2018. This county wide strategy articulates a shared vision for health and wellbeing in Essex and sets out key countywide strategic priorities, which address four areas of focus, all of which either directly or indirectly focus on keeping residents well at home:

- Improving mental health and wellbeing
- Addressing obesity, improving diet and increasing physical activity

- Influencing conditions and behaviours linked to health inequalities
- Enabling and supporting people with long-term conditions and disabilities.

Rochford and Castle Point's Health and Wellbeing Strategy/Action Plan 2019 – 2021 aligns with the Essex vision and it presents locally how the Councils will work together with partners to improve the health and wellbeing of its residents. The three local priorities are:

- Reducing levels of overweight and obesity
- Improving mental health and wellbeing
- Supporting people to lead independent lives to stay in their own homes for as long as possible

Housing and homeless features as one of the key local 'building blocks' across all priorities and as an integral part of the local action planning work.

3.13 Countywide Essex Housing Officers Groups

The Council works in partnership with neighbouring councils and officer groups that support joint initiatives include Homelessness Officer Groups, the Strategic Housing Partnership and a Well Homes/Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Group. The latter has been instrumental in considering the future for delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants following the withdrawal of Essex County Council revenue funding for the Home Improvement Agencies in 2017.

4 Our District and its Demographics – A Profile of Rochford District²

Note: This Strategy presents headline findings. For more information please see sources in the footnotes.

4.1 Geography

Rochford covers an area of 65 square miles and is predominantly rural in its character. Over 74% of the District's land mass remains designated as Green Belt land, excluding Foulness Island. Like other areas in South Essex we are served by several strategic roads, including A130, A127 and A13, with capacity limitations and a constrained local road network. Given the rural nature of the district, public transport provision can be limited. London Southend Airport and a new Airport Business Park are located within the district, acting as catalysts to support local economic growth.

² Unless otherwise stated, statistics from 'Essex Local Authority Portraits, A profile of people living in Rochford, May 2016 Organisational Intelligence'
https://www.rochford.gov.uk/sites/default/files/community_districtprofile.pdf

It has miles of coastline as well as vast areas of countryside. The District shares borders with Castle Point, Basildon and Southend-on-Sea Borough Councils.

There are marine boundaries with Maldon District and Chelmsford City Councils and a direct rail link to London Liverpool Street. Part of Rochford District lies within the Thames Gateway – a national priority for regeneration.

4.2 Population

The last formal population statistics were recorded in the 2011 National Census, which indicated that the population of Rochford District was 83,287. The latest population estimates from 2017, as published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) total 86,200.

The population of the District is predicted to continue to grow in the future. The ONS has published population growth projections up to 2041, which are based on observed rates of births, deaths and migration. These statistics show that between 2016 and 2031, the population of the District is projected to grow to 93,200, and then to 97,700 by 2041.

The age composition of the District's population is also predicted to undergo significant change by 2041. Rochford has an ageing population and the percentage of the population living in the District that are aged 65 or over is expected to increase considerably by 2041. By contrast, the number of residents aged 40-55 is expected to decrease. This is in line with regional and national trends.

4.3 Deprivation

Rochford is a generally affluent area and is amongst the least deprived districts in the country (ranked 281 out of 326 local authorities). Several parts of the District fall within the 10% least deprived areas of the country and, whilst pockets of deprivation exist in the town of Rochford and within some smaller rural communities, no parts of the District fall within the 10% most deprived areas nationally.

The Council's economic regeneration service delivers a yearly career options programme in local secondary schools, targeted at those pupils who are at the risk of disengaging and is planning to roll out a programme aimed at educating parents on the career options available to their children. The Council also looking to offer a recruitment and retraining fair, specifically targeted at those who are unemployed or in work but looking to retrain, and a wider skills and employability package for residents through social media platforms and e-bulletin. Other free events are also delivered to provide advice for those looking to start their own business and upskill those already employed.

4.4 Employment and Earnings

The District has a strong small enterprise offer with most businesses employing fewer than ten employees.

With around 30,000 jobs existing in the District, Rochford has a relatively low job density and a significant proportion of residents commute out of the District to London, Southend and other neighbouring large towns.

The largest sectors in the District are the public sector, financial and business services sector and the retail sector. The District is, however, home to important regional employment hubs, not least the expanding London Southend Airport and other key employment generating developments including the Airport Business Park which is currently under construction.

The District has an unemployment rate that is higher than the Essex average. Of those in employment, 23% of jobs are in the public sector, 16% are in financial/other business services and 17% are in the wholesale/retail sector. 90.4% of businesses in the District have 9 employees or less (greater than the Essex average of 89.5%).

Average gross weekly earnings for full time workers in 2015 were £525 in the District, lower than the Essex and England average of £575 and £533 respectively.

4.5 **Health³**

The life expectancy for residents of the District at birth is broadly equal to the national average at around 83 years.

The health of people in Rochford District is generally better than the England average. The District is one of the 20% least deprived districts/unitary authorities in England, however about 10% (1,300) of children live in low-income families. Life expectancy for both men and women are higher than the England average.

4.6 **Ageing Population**

Between 2015 and 2025, the number of people aged over 65 will increase by 19.2% from 19,187 to 22,866. By 2025 they will represent 25.6% of the total population in the District.

This is significant and has implications for housing and related health and social care services, particularly as the number of older people with dementia is expected to rise by 80% to 2,270 by 2030. In Rochford District, there are a higher number of hospital admissions due to hip fractures than the national average. Hip fractures can cause a loss of independence and are likely to result in increased need for housing adaptations and support.

In December 2016 the Council commissioned a Health Impact Assessment from Building Research Establishment. This helped the Council to understand

³ https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles/area-search-results/E12000006?search_type=list-child-areas&place_name=East%20of%20England

the condition of the private sector housing stock and its impact. This survey identified:

- There are 3,834 (12%) dwellings in the private stock with category 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards.
- It is estimated that poor housing conditions are responsible for over 214 harmful events requiring medical treatment every year.
- The estimated cost to the NHS of treating accidents and ill-health caused by these hazards is £941,290 each year.
- If all the estimated housing hazards are mitigated, then the total annual savings to the NHS total £872,640.
- Poor housing in Rochford District is estimated to cost around 84 quality-adjusted life-years.

Given the statistics above, the Council's work to tackle poor housing conditions and provide adaptations to help people live independently in their own home are essential, see section on 'People' for more information.

5 Our Housing Market and Housing Needs

Note: This Strategy presents the headline findings. For more detailed information on the housing market please see the Strategic Housing Market assessment (SHMA), the Quarterly Housing Market Bulletins, and the Stock Condition Survey – all are referenced in the Footnotes.

5.1 Tenure Mix

There are 34,810 dwellings in Rochford District.

- There are higher rates of owner occupation than the national average - with 83.1% of people owning their home in Rochford compared to 64.2% in England.
- There are significantly fewer housing association homes in Rochford than the national average - with 7.6% in Rochford compared to 17.7% in England.
- Rates of privately rented homes also fall below the national average - with 9.3% of stock being privately rented compared to the national average of 18.1%.

5.2 Private Sector Stock Condition

In December 2016 the Council commissioned the Building Research Establishment (BRE) to carry out some private housing stock profiling work and this found that: There are 3,834 (12%) dwellings in the private stock with category 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards.

- Of these hazards, 3,348 are in the owner-occupied sector and 486 are in the private rented sector. This equates to 11% of owner-occupied dwellings containing hazards and 15% of properties in the private rented sector.
- The highest concentrations of all HHSRS hazards in the private sector are found in the wards of Roche North & Rural, Foulness & The Wakerings and Roche South.
- The highest concentrations of fuel poverty (Low Income High Cost definition) in the private sector are found in the wards of Roche South, Roche North & Rural and Wheatley and for excess cold the highest levels are in the Roche North & Rural, Foulness & The Wakerings and Roche South wards.
- The total cost of mitigating category 1 housing hazards in the District's private sector stock is estimated to be £21.6 million.
- 4.9% (1,621) of private sector dwellings and 9.3% (299) of private rented dwellings in the District are estimated to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating below band E.

The Council's work in the private sector therefore remains important and interventions result in quantifiable savings to the NHS and wider society, as detailed above (see section on 'People' and 'Property').

5.3 House Prices and Affordability⁴

Rochford District is an expensive place to buy a house. First time buyers and those on low / average incomes struggle to access home ownership.

- According to the NHF Home Truths Report 2018⁵, in 2016/17, the average (mean) house price cost £334,595 and the average (mean) earnings were £30,415.
- The affordability ratio of house prices: incomes is 10:8 making the property market unaffordable for first time buyers and those on low and average incomes.

⁴ http://www.tgessex.co.uk/downloads/TGSE_Housing_Market_Trends_Quarterly_Report_Apr_17.pdf

⁵ http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/doc.housing.org.uk/Hometruths/Home_Truths_201718_East_of_England.pdf

- 51% of first-time buyers cannot afford a flat or maisonette based on a mortgage at 3.0 times their income. This rises to 80% for those wishing to purchase a terraced property, and 100% for a detached property.
- Over the last ten years, the average lower quartile house price has increased from £190k (Aug 2008) to £285k (Jan 2018)⁶. This is an increase of £95k and represents the largest house price increase across South Essex in the period.
- There are indications that the market is slowing (Spring 2018). Average house price growth has halved during the last year (2017/18). This is may be due to uncertainty over Brexit and potential interest rate rises. Whilst this dampens consumer confidence and has led to a reduction in housing market activity, a noticeable decline in house prices is very unlikely.

5.4 Private Sector Rents and Affordability

Rochford District is also an expensive place to rent a property. People who are reliant on housing benefit struggle to find accommodation that is within the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.

- According to the NHF Home Truths Report 2018⁷, in 2016/17, the average (mean) private sector rent was £915 pcm.
- According to the South Essex Housing Market Analysis⁸, the cost of renting a property privately in South Essex is most expensive in Rochford District at £233pweek, for one-bedroom property.
- There is a gap between the cost of rents and the Local Housing Allowance. This has widened by as much as £116 per week, increasing more than five-fold from May 2016 making accessing rented housing difficult for people on low incomes / reliant on benefits.
- Accessing the private rented sector will become be more difficult for households on LHA as Central Government have frozen the Local Housing allowance rate for 4 years, up to 2020.

These statistics demonstrate that the District is unaffordable for first time buyers and those on low/average incomes and highlights the need for additional affordable housing in a range of tenures that meet the needs of income groups including aspirant homeowners.

The private rented sector is smaller than the national average and there is a need to support buy-to-let investors and institutional investment in private rented housing to boost supply where there is interest.

⁶ http://www.tgessex.co.uk/index.php/tgse_sections/housing

⁷ http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/doc.housing.org.uk/Hometruths/Home_Truths_201718_East_of_England.pdf

⁸ http://www.tgessex.co.uk/downloads/TGSE_Housing_Market_Trends_Quarterly_Report_Apr_17.pdf

5.5 **The Need for Housing**

The Core Planning Strategy sets an annual housing target of 250 dwellings per year up to 2025.

The South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was reviewed and published on 10 May 2016, with an addendum published in June 2017. This SHMA identified an Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) for housing in the district of between 331 and 361 dwellings per annum up to 2037.

It is further noted that a consultation was held by the Department for Communities and Local Government between 14 September 2017 and 9 November 2017 on the introduction of a new standard methodology for calculating housing need, which was later formalised through revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in July 2018. This standard methodology for calculating local housing need supersedes the SHMA and establishes 362 dwellings per annum for the Rochford District.

As detailed in the Core Planning Strategy, new developments must contain a mix of dwelling types to ensure they cater for all residents. In 2016-18, the most common size of dwelling being delivered in the District was a 3-bed home, with a significant number of 2- and 4-bed homes also being delivered. The proportion of 1-bed and 5+-bed homes being lower.

5.6 **The Need for Affordable Housing**

The Core Planning Strategy sets out that 35% of housing on sites of 15 dwellings or more, or on sites greater than 0.5 hectares, must be affordable, subject to viability. The Council aims for 80% of affordable housing to be social housing with the remaining 20% provided as intermediate housing, including shared ownership.

The South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2016) and Addendum (2017), recognise that there are affordability issues across the sub-region and identified a need for 238 affordable dwellings per annum within the Rochford District.

Between April 2016 and March 2018, there were 52 affordable housing units completed as part of major residential development schemes, however, the total figure is likely to be higher once housing association-led developments and acquisitions are factored in

5.7 **Accommodation Needs of Gypsies and Travellers**

As of April 2018, there are seven private Gypsy and Traveller sites in the District providing a total of 10 pitches/plots. There are an additional 12 pitches/plots across six sites that are unauthorised and not tolerated.

It is important that appropriate locations are identified for sites in order to meet Gypsy and Traveller needs as well as to enable action to be taken against unauthorised sites in inappropriate locations.

A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) was produced in 2017; it provided an assessment of the District's future demand for Gypsy and Traveller pitches/plots, prompted by a change in 2015 of the definition of a 'traveller' for planning purposes.

The GTAA identified a need to provide 19 pitches in the District by 2033, to take account of natural household growth, concealed households and unauthorised sites. There is insufficient evidence of need for any transit provision (short term stopping places) but this will be kept under review.

These findings will be used as the basis for an enabling policy in the forthcoming Joint Strategic Plan and Local Plan that seeks to meet these needs.

5.8 Housing and Related Needs of Older People

Essex County Council has set out its intentions⁹ for the provision of accommodation for older people. This includes a proposed increase in the number of 'Independent Living Units' across Essex. These are aimed at people aged over 55 years and are schemes typically of 60 homes which are built to 'Lifetime homes' standards. Schemes can include a range of features including communal space for social activities; a dining room and meal service; amenities such as hairdressing, fitness suite, consulting rooms and GP or other health services. They have the potential to become a focal point for community health services, outreach services and intermediate/reablement care where this is deemed appropriate for the locality. Schemes should provide for a range of tenures to meet needs.

In July 2015, the County Council endorsed capital investment of circa £27 million with enabling revenue investment to facilitate the delivery of 1,800 units of independent living over a 5-year period to 2021.

As of September 2016, there are 22 schemes in the Independent Living Programme Pipeline process, with a total number of Independent Living units in the Pipeline exceeding 1,200.

The status of those schemes ranges from potential for development to schemes under construction. The Council's new Local Plan will address housing for older people, including those with specialist needs.

5.9 Homelessness

Homelessness continues to increase nationally, and the position is no different in Rochford District, largely due to high house prices in both the rental and home ownership markets which limit the housing options for all household types. The biggest challenge is the lack of permanent affordable housing to move homeless households into and therefore there is the need to increase the provision of affordable housing through this Strategy.

⁹ <https://www.livingwellessex.org/vision/commissioning-intentions/independent-living/independent-living-older-people-position-statement>

Significant progress in developing partnerships has been made, with social and private developers to deliver new temporary accommodation and this has enabled the Council to accommodate homeless households in more suitable local temporary accommodation whilst they seek a permanent home.

The Council has successfully implemented the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which came into force in April 2018. Additional staff have been recruited and a new ICT system has been implemented. This has supported enhanced homelessness prevention casework and earlier engagement and support for people facing homelessness.

A full Review of Homelessness in Rochford District and the services available to tackle it was carried out with the support of the East of England Local Government Association in spring 2018.

5.10 Housing Register

The Council holds and administers the Housing Register and has nomination rights to 75% of properties with all Housing Associations, with the remainder let via a separate register held directly by the Housing Associations. In total 9 registered social landlords are active in the district. The total stock of general needs affordable homes is approximately 2,700. Shared ownership and supported housing (including extra care) account for a further 150 homes.

The number of households on the Housing Register was 724 in December 2018. The numbers of households housed from the register has nearly doubled from 97 in 2016/17 to 160 in 2017/18 and 110 in 2018/19, reflecting an increase in the number of new developments across the district. This increased supply has a significant impact on homelessness numbers in temporary accommodation and best use is made of voids by using transfers to free up larger homes.

The Council's Allocations Policy was reviewed in June 2018 and has been amended to bring it in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and includes increased priority for households threatened with homelessness.

5.11 The Need for Specialist / Supported Housing

The need for specialist and supported housing for vulnerable groups was considered as part of the Homelessness Review Spring 2018.

There is a multi-disciplinary generic floating support service which provides housing related support to vulnerable people in the District. This is an effective and flexible model of delivery and delivers better value for money and a more person-centred service than accommodation-based supported housing. The service is currently commissioned by Essex County Council and delivered by Peabody Housing to approximately 87 people a year, with significantly more people accessing their drop-in sessions. The high proportion of clients with mental health issues accessing the service is of concern.

Funding for this service is secure for 2019/20 but commissioning intentions should be closely monitored going forward to ensure that support services for people with mental health needs continue to be provided.

It is anticipated that a Supported Housing Strategic Plan will be developed for Essex and that this will lead to specific review of support needs and an opportunity for District Councils to further consider the need within their local areas and firm up commissioning plans.

6. **Our Key Housing Priorities**

Place

Our Key Housing Priorities are:

- To support the delivery of appropriate housing growth in Rochford District
- To use all available resources to deliver affordable housing to meet needs

The key housing priorities for the Council have been grouped into four key areas:

- **Place**
- **People**
- **Property**
- **Partnerships**

6.1 **Housing Targets**

The Council's 2011 Core Planning Strategy sets a target for new development of 250 dwellings per year up to 2025. The updated SHMA (2017) suggested an objectively assessed need in the range of 331-361 dwellings p.a. and the government's new methodology for calculating need has concluded a figure of 362 dwellings p.a. The forthcoming Local Plan to 2037 must therefore demonstrate delivery of 362 dwellings p.a. to meet the objectively assessed need.

6.2 **Housing Delivery to 2017/18**

Current completions of all new homes are set out in Table A¹⁰:

¹⁰ Source: Authority Monitoring Reports <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/authority-monitoring-report>

Table A

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	Total
Target for new homes built per year (Core Strategy)	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	1,750
Total number of new homes built per year	93	97	248	167	148	117	299	1169 167 (annual average)
Under / over delivery	-157	-153	-2	-83	-102	-133	+44	-586

Despite sites being allocated in the Local Plan, there has been under delivery of new homes in the district. Positively, there is a strategic interest from large national house builders to build in the District and sites are now coming on stream contributing to an upward trajectory.

Increasing housing delivery from an average of 141 new dwellings per year to 360 will still, however, require commitment and resources and the Local and Joint Strategic Plans will be the delivery mechanisms as to how this could be achieved.

6.3 Housing Delivery Trajectory 2018 onwards

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Housing Trajectory	277	697	675	585	342	270	200

Sites that are already allocated for housing development from adopted plans, are expected to provide around 2,600 new homes by 2025. This includes allocated sites that are currently being built out (such as Hall Road Rochford), allocated sites that have planning permission but are yet to start building (such as West Rayleigh and Hullbridge) and allocated sites which are yet to receive planning permission (such as South East Ashingdon).

The Council's latest monitoring also suggests that planning permission exists for around 500 further homes on non-allocated sites; however, the Council has less certainty over the timescales and likelihood of these homes being built.

There is a requirement under the Duty to Co-operate for the Council to work in partnership with its neighbours to deliver an appropriate and realistic strategy for meeting needs across South Essex in the future. A Statement of Common Ground has been agreed by the South Essex Authorities as a precursor to the preparation of the Joint Strategic Plan.

6.4 Community / Neighbourhood Plans

The Council supports parishes in their development of Community Plans and so far, these have been adopted in Hullbridge, Great Wakering, Hawkwell and Hockley. To date there are no formal Neighbourhood Plans, although Canewdon is progressing its own plan. These could be a way to enable small scale sensitive affordable housing developments to meet identified needs.

6.5 Affordable Housing

The Council's 2011 Core Planning Strategy states that 35% of developments with 15 or more dwellings should be affordable. It states that 80% should be affordable / social rented and the remaining 20% should be intermediate.

The quantum and tenure balance can be amended where viability renders a scheme undeliverable, although viability has not been a significant issue in the district to date and policy-compliant schemes have been delivered.

In July 2018 Government published changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and includes a change in the affordable homes definition to include discount market sales housing or other routes to home ownership and there is a minimum 10% requirement for affordable homeownership on major sites

6.6 Future Delivery of Affordable Housing

There are only 3 Housing Associations in the district that are active developers. The Council does not have any of its own stock, this was transferred in 2007 to Sanctuary Housing Association (SHA), which is the main housing providers within the District.

SHA is currently in the process of delivering over 360 new homes across the district, which includes over 240 affordable rented and shared ownership homes over the next 2years. There are several ways SHA has delivered this trajectory, including several successful competitive bids to private house builders in the District to deliver the 35% affordable homes portion of all new sites. SHA has also purchased development sites in the District to build a mix of market housing; and it has planned to build on small scale garage sites.

	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20 *	20/21 *
Delivery of new affordable/ social rented	33	59	28	32	8	43	100	150	271
Delivery of shared ownership	34 in the period								

*projected completions

To date, delivery has fallen short of the identified need (268 affordable homes per year). However, as residential site allocations, as identified in the Council's 2014 Allocation Plan, have progressed, especially the large site in Rochford town, the pipeline of affordable homes is due to increase significantly from 2017/18. This positive trajectory will assist the Council and its partners with meeting front line housing needs.

6.7 Rural Housing

Rochford District is a rural district and it is important that there are opportunities to bring forward small scale affordable housing schemes in areas where there is an identified need. It is therefore necessary for the Council to consider adopting appropriate policies in the forthcoming Local Plan which enable the responsible growth of its rural areas.

Action Plan

To support the growth of Rochford District and meet affordable housing needs we will:

- Review the Local Plan setting out the scale and distribution of housing growth in the period to 2037
- Consider opportunities for new affordable homes from the Council's land bank and other public sector agencies who own land in the district including the County Council
- Consider other opportunities to deliver new affordable housing including using the Council's borrowing abilities (via the Capital Assets and Investment Strategy)
- Work in partnership with housing associations who can buy land for development
- Support the development of Community and Neighbourhood Plans which seek to increase appropriate housing growth

People

Our Key Housing Priorities are:

- To meet housing needs and reduce homelessness in partnership
- To meet the needs of our ageing population and other vulnerable groups

6.8 Housing Needs and Homelessness

The 2018 Homelessness Review (the “Review”) provided a comprehensive overview of the demands on the service, causes of homelessness, support services available, the needs of vulnerable groups, temporary accommodation provision etc. The Review provides the evidence base for this strategy. The main conclusions were:

Demand - Demand for homeless prevention services in the District is likely to grow due to the increasing cost of housing in the area. There will be many challenges for the Housing Team in seeking new solutions to prevent homelessness in line with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. However, the new structures and renewed energy within the team provides a solid foundation on which to build a strong prevention service.

Causes of homelessness – One of the main causes is eviction by family and friends, therefore a priority is to develop a service that provides early home visits from officers skilled in mediation, who take a holistic approach to the whole household’s circumstances and seek innovative ways to resolve the issues that may lead to homelessness. Solutions should be sustainable, and if homelessness is inevitable, to work with people to plan a move into alternative housing, rather than have to deal with a crisis.

Care Leavers - Care leavers who are homeless can be particularly vulnerable and the Council work in partnership with Essex Social Care and Young Peoples Panel to prevent care leavers from approaching the Council as homeless. This work remains an ongoing action and consideration is being given to developing a local life skills and awareness programme, for care leavers and young people, who may need support prior to taking on new tenancies and accommodation.

Young people are an example of recurring homelessness and there is a need to keep working with partners to expand the access to local supported housing schemes.

Homeless prevention - There is a need to further develop the relationship with landlords, both private landlords/letting agencies and housing associations to ensure that any problems with tenants are identified at an early stage. Developing protocols to refer tenants to homelessness prevention officers at a much earlier stage will allow solutions to be identified before tenancies are put at risk.

Temporary Accommodation – Numbers in temporary accommodation remain relatively unchanged and numbers placed outside the district in bed and breakfast and nightly let accommodation are reducing, placements into B&B are still made and this must be avoided in future. Plans are in place to provide more temporary accommodation in the district and once this is in place to carry out a further review of out of area accommodation and develop a plan to reduce this over time.

Rough Sleeping - The Homelessness Act 2002 requires that homelessness strategies tackle all forms of homelessness that are defined in law, which encompasses rough sleeping.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) published a rough sleeping strategy and delivery plan in 2018. The strategy sets out an ambition to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. A series of actions are grouped together under three objectives – prevention, intervention and recovery.

Rough sleeping can be a visible form of homelessness, but for the District it is not the most common form of homelessness, with those experiencing hidden homelessness forecast to be up to be greater than those experiencing street homelessness. The most common reasons for homelessness locally are the ending of private tenancies; breakdown of family relationships and domestic abuse. These numbers are far greater than those estimated to be sleeping rough.

The number of people rough sleeping in the District has been estimated as low i.e. over the past 3 years, average numbers are below 10. The number of people rough sleeping can vary throughout the year, with some rough sleepers also spending time sofa-surfing or moving to neighbouring towns

The commitments made by the MHCLG in the Rough Sleeping strategy are being put into practice locally through the following actions:

- Working with CHES Homeless: Homelessness is often seen as the cause of rough sleeping, however, many rough sleepers have a range of other support needs including: Mental and physical health; Social care; Alcohol dependencies. It is essential that these needs are also addressed, in order to help individuals' access new accommodation and minimise the risk of them returning to rough sleeping in the future.

The council has very recently commissioned a rough sleeper outreach service through its prevention funds until April 2021. The service is delivered by a local homeless charity, CHES.

As a district with historic low numbers of rough sleepers, the Council recognises the challenge of commissioning a service that may only be used as an exception in an area where there are few other related services such as night-shelters and daycentres. This creates an environment of low likelihood but possible high risk for those who do become street homeless.

There is also a lack of services to assist more entrenched rough sleepers who may move into the District so the commissioned service should also be able to provide an initial response to this group.

Guidance recognises that effective working requires co-operation across several organisations, both statutory and voluntary. The Council has a statutory duty to identify housing need in its area and provide as a minimum housing advice to those who are homeless. This places an obligation on the Council to make reasonable efforts to facilitate if not provide services for all those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Street homelessness may be the most acute form of homelessness but there is an overlap with other housing need and services provided to a wider group, this includes for example the voluntary sector who may offer help with food, clothing, and temporary accommodation; the health services – whether based within the community or local hospitals; social care including community mental health, young people and those who maybe especially vulnerable for other reasons; the criminal justice system – police, probation and Youth Offending Teams; and of course providers of housing – private landlords, social landlords and supported housing providers.

It may be difficult to maintain active support with such a broad range of agencies in an area where there are low numbers, however, the Council and CHES will link as best as possible with existing local services such as local churches, foodbanks, floating support, Health and Wellbeing Boards and other local community groups.

By gaining a better understanding of the causes and support needs of those who become street homeless it is hoped that the Council can work with partners to further improve its record for prevention of homelessness, including the ability of others to recognise risks and engage with the Council sooner rather than later.

- Ensuring adequate severe weather emergency provision: by reviewing current provision and providing dedicated accommodation in the new developed single units of temporary accommodation within the district.
- Work with town councils, local community groups, community safety hub and local community policing team to tackle unacceptable anti-social behaviour, health and safety risks and criminal activity on the town's streets.

Encourage clients to engage with services; where applicable to safeguard those involved and at risk of exploitation; to reassure the public of effective partnership working to reduce levels of ASB.

Settled homes - New supply of affordable housing is required and further work is needed to ensure the pipeline of new affordable homes is delivered in order to meet future need. The focus will be on working with partner associations and other internal departments to deliver affordable homes in the main areas of need.

There is ongoing demand for smaller affordable accommodation for single adults. Settled homes such as lodgings, shared housing and house-share are options available across the district.

Action Plan

In order to meet housing needs and reduce homelessness the Council will:

- Ensure easy access and availability of information, detailing the new prevention approach and the support services available.
- Expand the Prevention Fund policy to make it available for anybody threatened with homelessness, including non-priority households.
- Work with social and housing providers to ensure they identify at an early stage tenants in rent arrears or otherwise at risk of eviction.
- Explore opportunities to jointly commission services including Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) with neighbouring authorities to support the needs of those who are homeless now and at risk of homelessness.
- Continue to work in partnership with both housing association and private sector partners to deliver new temporary accommodation to eliminate the use of B&B.
- Continue to work in partnership to increase local supported accommodation for young people and support young people to prepare for a new tenancy.

6.9 Meeting the Needs of the Ageing Population

Housing for older people and extra care - Across Essex there is a strategic intent to increase the provision of independent living units (housing designed for older people).

Land owned by Essex County Council in Rochford Town is being used to develop a 60-unit independent living scheme for older people and 14 private houses. This will help to meet the identified needs.

Essex County Council also has a strategic aim to increase the provision of extra care housing for frail older people¹¹. There are currently 478 units of extra care accommodation through 11 schemes. This equates to 1.5 per 1,000 of the population compared to the national picture of 4.5 per 1,000. Based on the national prevalence rates, More Choice Greater Voice recommends 25 units per 1,000 of the population 75+. Compared to this recommendation Essex currently has a deficit of 2,700 units.

Together with the County Council, the Council will work pro-actively to increase the provision of good quality affordable housing for older people to meet the intentions of the commissioning strategies.

Improving Property Conditions that impact on health - The Council works pro-actively to improve housing conditions that impact on health including falls prevention and remedies for excess cold. In 2017/18 it was estimated that these interventions saved over £890k to the NHS / wider society as a result of the Council's prevention and intervention work in this area.

Home adaptations - The Council works in partnership to promote independently living including through the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). In 2018/19, 35 households with complex needs, were supported to live independently through the provision of home adaptations such as extension work, level success showers and stair lifts. The Essex-wide Well Homes/DFG Group have recently collaborated with health and social care to champion an integrated way of working together to support the ageing population to stay well and healthy at home. This has been enshrined in a Memorandum of Understanding which is signed by the partners. The commitment of all authorities is to tackle poor housing conditions and enable people to live independently.

6.10 Supporting vulnerable groups

The Homeless Review considered the needs of vulnerable groups and what services are available to support people especially if they are threatened with homelessness. These included:

- Rough sleepers
- Single homeless
- Young people and care leavers
- Families
- Victims of domestic abuse
- People with mental health problems
- Offenders and those at risk of offending
- People with substance misuse issues

¹¹ <https://www.livingwellessex.org/vision/market-shaping/market-position-statement/mps-2014-16/6-supply-and-demand-ageing-well/67-extra-care-and-housing>

- Older people
- People with a learning or physical disability
- People leaving hospital
- Former members of the regular armed forces

The main concern identified within the Review is the need for support for people suffering mental illness, who make up a growing number of those facing homelessness including families - many of whom are suffering from stress and anxiety. While floating support services already provide a flexible solution, capacity is limited, and demand continues to grow.

In addition, while few, those presenting with complex needs i.e. rough sleepers, people with offending and substance misuse issues present challenges to services and in order to find solutions, a multi-agency response is required. Priority should be given to continuing to develop effective partnerships with both statutory, voluntary and community organisations to ensure people receive the support they need, not only in terms of accommodation but ongoing support to maintain it.

Action Plan

In order to support older people and other vulnerable groups the Council will:

- Influence the forthcoming Health and Well Being Strategy to ensure the health needs of the people of Rochford District are reflected
- Work in partnership with Essex County Council to meet the housing needs of older people in new Independent Living Units and Extra Care.
- Continue to work with Essex authorities Social Care and Health to streamline adaptation services for private tenants and homeowners to ensure homes are safe and appropriate for the occupants
- Consider the availability of floating support for people with mental health issues not meeting statutory thresholds for services and whether additional resources could be made available.

Property

Our Key Housing Priorities are:

- To raise standards of housing management and property conditions in the private sector, especially those that have an impact on health
- To maximise the use of existing private housing stock including empty homes
- To prevent homelessness from the private rented sector

6.10 Private Sector Housing

The Council has a role in ensuring that property in the private sector is in good condition. While homeowners are responsible for the maintenance and repair of their own homes, properties let on the private market need to be in good repair and meet Housing Standards. There is however a need to balance this with a desire to build good relations with private landlords to encourage them to let to households in need. Owner occupiers are encouraged to maintain their own homes, but in some cases, older and disabled people may be able to access financial support to maintain their homes and remain living independently.

6.11 Private Landlords and Letting Agents

The Council is developing good relationships with private landlords through partnership work. This includes a joint approach with neighbouring councils to promote regular Landlord Forums to share information and a local support offer for landlords who may be experiencing problems with tenants.

The pro-active approach towards those facing homelessness from private rented tenancies by the Housing Options team is already having some effect and private landlords welcome the more personalised service provided by officers adopting the new homelessness prevention approach.

6.12 Private Sector Stock Condition

The quality of housing is as equally important as access to it. The Council's private housing stock is in relatively good condition; however, the private rented sector is generally worse than other tenures. The key points to note are:

- There are an estimated 3,800 (12%) dwellings in the private stock with over 5,000 category 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards. The most common hazards are falls and excess cold.
- The estimated total cost of mitigating all these hazards is £10.5 million with £1.8 million in the private rented sector.

- It is estimated that poor housing conditions are responsible for over 214 harmful events requiring medical treatment every year.

The Council uses the data from its stock modelling and the health impact assessment to proactively assist vulnerable residents living in the poorest quality housing, prioritising its work to reducing severe housing hazards and improving management practices across the private rented sector. In 2018/19, 106 category 1 housing hazards were removed through a combination of prevention and intervention actions, which included 256 informal and 19 formal enforcement actions being taken.

Ongoing work to understand and communicate with private landlords and letting agents is also a key work area, as the private rented sector needs to play a positive role in ensuring housing standards are maintained, enabling an improved supply and access to the sector, for those residents in housing need.

6.13 Well Homes Financial Assistance

Well home financial offers are used by the Council to support vulnerable and disabled homeowners, to keep their property safe and maintain independent living. The Well Homes Financial Assistance Policy recently reviewed and adopted by the Council reflects a 'safety net' approach and provides a range of flexible discretionary offers of assistance as well as mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), all of which support both the local joint and county wide Health and Wellbeing priorities.

In 2018/19 35 complex DFG's were completed allowing residents to stay at home, resulting in an estimated £609,000 saving to both NHS and the wider society, with the reduction of the most severe housing hazards i.e. falls.

The Council currently chairs an Essex Well Homes (DFG) group, which shares an ambition to provide services that are integrated and take full account of the needs of the individual, so they can remain independent in their own home.

6.14 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

In Rochford District the number of known households living in HMOs is relatively low i.e. 20 but has increased by 23% over 5 years. The real number of HMOs, however, are likely to be greater, with the projected increase in the number of single households, impact of Welfare Reforms and the lack of affordability to access home ownership resulting in increased demand for private sector and intermediate housing.

The identification and management of HMOs in the District is predominately reactive, with identification and enforcement through complaints from tenants, neighbours or third parties.

The Council is part of a wider Essex HMO officers' group where best practice is shared and a consistent approach is taken to enforcing standards, using the Essex Approved Code of Practice Amenity Standards in HMOs.

Mandatory licensing of HMO's controls standards for certain larger HMO's and only 3 are managed in this way in the District.

6.15 Empty Homes

Empty homes are recognised as a wasted resource, depriving people of a much-needed home. It is only when properties stay empty longer than six months without any obvious signs of renovation or rental that they become 'true' empty homes.

The detailed reasons why properties are empty are not known, but information gained to date from the Council's informal approach, to returning properties back into use, shows that the reasons are varied and often personal to the owner due to family circumstances or financial reasons.

The actual numbers of long-term empty properties (2018) are relatively low:

- 220 homes in the District are recorded on Council Tax records as 'empty'
- 31 of those have been empty for more than five years.

Since 2017 the Council has been focussing on this smaller number of long-term empty properties, resulting in a reduction from 40 to the current 31. The actual net impact is a 22% reduction. The project remains ongoing.

The Council's general approach to date has been informal. Over 100 visits on average are carried out each year to prioritised sites, with a proactive approach of targeting information to owners of long-term empty owners and encouraging all residents to 'report empty properties' through a dedicated web page and email.

In addition to this prioritised work, the Council continues to work closely with private housing/housing options, enabling some 'joined up' conversations taking any opportunities to talk with owners of empty properties to bring them back into use including the offer of discretionary Empty Homes Grants for certain works, in return for nomination rights for a limited period.

The Council has an empty homes strategy that was adopted in 2015. It details that officers will consider the use of enforcement action but only after all other avenues to encourage the owner to bring the property back into use have been exhausted.

Action Plan

In order to meet our private rented sector priorities, the Council will:

- To engage with private sector landlords and agents through ongoing Landlords Forums, to share information, best practice, and support landlords to improve standards
- To work with statutory, voluntary and community partners to pilot 'well homes navigators', increasing 'eyes and ears' on the ground to reduce housing hazards for all vulnerable residents
- To support and participate in multi-agency community safety operations/patrols – joint working with agencies such as HMRC, Fire Brigade, Police and Immigration
- To promote an amnesty for licensable HMOs - to raise awareness with Landlords as to the new license requirements and standards
- To increase the volume of reported/identified HMO properties through increased public awareness and proactive joint working with relevant agencies
- To work with the owners of long-term empty homes, to support and encourage voluntary action to bring these homes back into use
- Ongoing review of data and intelligence on empty homes with internal partners, enabling targeted interventions
- To review the Empty Homes Strategy, working with the resources available, prioritising an informal approach
- To work with the Housing Options team to approach local landlords and letting agents to jointly look at ways of overcoming barriers to working with clients on low incomes
- To develop a new landlord/agent offer, maximising the use of homeless prevention fund policy
- To support private tenants/homeless clients to quickly and effectively resolve housing issues, with a better understanding of housing standards and responsibilities

Partnerships

Our Key Housing Priority is:

- We will work in partnership to achieve our housing objectives, and channel internal and external resources to deliver this Strategy.

6.16 Strategic Partnerships

The Council has partnership arrangements with Essex County and District Councils as demonstrated by the Opportunity South Essex (Thames Gateway / South Essex Growth) Partnership and the more recent South Essex 2050 partnership, who have been working together at a senior and political level on a shared vision for South Essex. This recognises that there are growth pressures that need to be pro-actively managed and there are benefits in collaboration. These partnerships will be used to deliver the Council's Priority to support the delivery of growth and make the best use of publicly owned land. We need to strengthen our relationship with Homes England to increase external funding and raise the profile of South Essex as an area which is committed to the strategic and proactive delivery of housing growth.

6.17 Housing Association Partnerships

The Council works closely with housing associations in the district as part of the County wide Housing Nomination protocol. It works particularly closely with Sanctuary Housing Association with whom they are developing a robust pipeline of new affordable homes. Housing providers work across council boundaries and there are opportunities to work in partnership with other South Essex authorities to develop a joint commissioning approach to some services, especially those related to homelessness and housing support.

6.18 Private Sector partnerships

As detailed earlier, partnerships with our private sector landlords and developers can play a significant role in supporting the Council to meet its wider housing priorities. This will be an ongoing priority for the Council in terms of access to private rented homes and the provision of temporary and settled affordable accommodation where private partnerships are already having an impact.

6.19 Voluntary Sector and Faith Groups

The Homelessness Forum and the Essex Prevents work ensures that all parties with an interest in preventing homelessness including city, district and boroughs across Essex including Town and Parish Councils, local community and faith groups, charities, etc. have a voice and an opportunity to engage and steer services for people facing homelessness with in the Rochford District.

This also provides a sound platform from which to implement the homeless Duty to Refer, which was introduced in October 2018.

The Council's relationship with local faith groups is already paying dividends in terms of low-level homelessness prevention and early intervention e.g. meal provision sites and all parties value these relationships and are keen to further develop opportunities for partnership working.

Action Plan

In order to ensure a joined-up approach we will:

- Strengthen our partnership with Homes England as the Government's investment and funding agency
- Work in partnership with neighbouring authorities under the Duty to Co-operate to strategically plan to meet our housing needs across the wider South Essex area and deliver a Joint Strategic Plan for South Essex in pursuit of the 2050 vision
- Promote the Essex Homeless Memorandum of Understanding and use this to embed the Duty to Refer
- Develop relationships with our housing association partners in order to ensure our housing needs are met, delivering the right affordable homes in the right place at the right time
- Continue to promote joint working and strong links with the private rented sector and explore any opportunities to develop a local private rental offer.

7. Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-21 – Action Plan (Action plan covers first two years of Strategy. To be reviewed and updated annually)

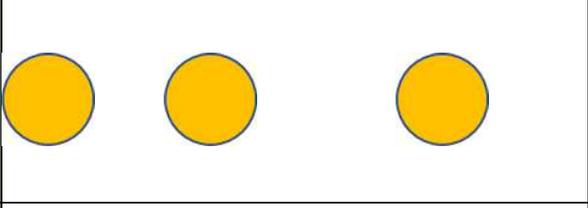
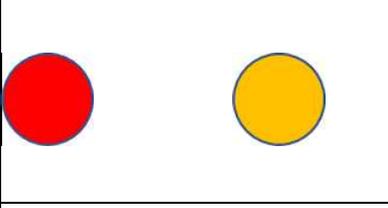
What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of success	When will we do it	Progress
Place				
We support the Delivery of appropriate Housing Growth in Rochford District and will use all available resources to deliver affordable housing to meet needs	<p>Prepare a South Essex Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) working with partner local authorities in South Essex</p> <p>Review the Local Plan setting out the scale and distribution of housing growth in the period to 2037</p> <p>Consider opportunities for new affordable homes from the Council's land bank and other public sector agencies who own land in the District, including the County Council</p> <p>Consider other opportunities to deliver new affordable housing including through the use of the Council's borrowing abilities (via the Capital Asset Strategy)</p>	<p>First phase i.e. Spatial strategy options, including preferred option public consultation</p> <p>Proposed Pre-Submission Document public consultation</p> <p>Submission to Secretary of State for independent examination</p> <p>Review of opportunities to develop public sector land carried out</p> <p>Option to use Council borrowing explored and opportunities identified</p>	<p>January- March 2020</p> <p>March 2020</p> <p>Autumn 2020</p> <p>October/November 2019</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	

What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of success	When will we do it	Progress
	<p>Work in partnership with housing associations who can buy land for development.</p> <p>Support the development of Community and Neighbourhood Plans which seek to increase appropriate housing growth.</p>	<p>Develop a programme of affordable housing with partner housing associations.</p> <p>Promotion to parishes where Community and Neighbourhood Plans could be developed with available funding.</p>	<p>April 2019 ongoing</p> <p>April 2019 Ongoing</p>	
People				
We will meet housing needs and reduce homelessness in partnership	<p>Ensure easy access and availability of information, detailing support services available.</p> <p>Expand the Prevention Fund policy to make it available for anybody threatened with homelessness, including non-priority households.</p> <p>Work with social housing providers to ensure they identify at an early stage tenants in rent arrears or otherwise at risk of eviction.</p> <p>Explore opportunities to jointly commission services including Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEPE) to support the needs of those</p>	<p>Website updated and downloadable factsheets available</p> <p>Policy reviewed and adopted to widen scope and provide additional incentives.</p> <p>Develop protocols with housing providers to identify households at risk</p> <p>SWEPE service in place.</p>	<p>Complete. Ongoing.</p> <p>Complete. Review annually.</p> <p>Ongoing. New social housing forum in place.</p> <p>Complete. New commissioned service in place. Review annually.</p>	

What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of success	When will we do it	Progress
	<p>who are homeless now and at risk of homelessness.</p> <p>Continue to work in partnership with both housing association and private sector partners to develop new temporary accommodation to eliminate the use of B&B.</p> <p>Continue to work in partnership to increase local supported accommodation for young people and support young people to prepare for a new tenancy.</p>	<p>Develop an additional 11 units of temporary accommodation in Rochford.</p> <p>Tenancy awareness programme in place</p>	<p>December 2019</p> <p>April 2021</p>	 
<p>We will meet the needs of our ageing population and other vulnerable groups</p>	<p>Influence the forthcoming local joint Health and Well Being Strategy to ensure the health needs of the people of Rochford District are reflected;</p> <p>Work in partnership with Essex County Council to meet the housing needs of older people in new Independent Living Units and Extra Care</p>	<p>Priority within the new local strategy. Ongoing support and 'voice' at Health & Wellbeing Board meetings</p> <p>New Extra Care Scheme completed</p>	<p>Complete.</p> <p>Ongoing quarterly reviews at Board level.</p> <p>March- June 2020</p>	 

What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of success	When will we do it	Progress
	To continue to work with Essex authorities Social Care and Health to streamline adaptation services for private tenants and owner occupiers to ensure homes are safe and appropriate for the occupants.	Systems and procedures reviewed and in place to ensure early identification of elderly or disabled households in need.	March 2019 (ongoing)	
Property				
We will raise standards of housing management and property conditions in the private sector, especially those that have an impact on health	Engage with private sector landlords and agents through ongoing Landlords Forums, to share information, best practice, and support landlords to improve standards. Work with statutory, voluntary and community partners to pilot 'well homes navigators', increasing 'eyes and ears' on the ground to reduce housing hazards for all vulnerable residents. Support and participate in multi-agency community safety operations/patrols - joint working with agencies such as HMRC, Fire Brigade, Police and Immigration	Arrange in partnership with neighbouring authorities a joint private sector Landlord Forum at least annually. Complete pilot and evaluate Awareness raised: Informal and formal actions	September 2018 (Castle Point lead) March 2019 (Rochford lead) November 2019 (South Essex forum) Complete. New partnership in place April 2019. Annual review. Ongoing – linked to police operations. Av. 6monthly.	 

What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of success	When will we do it	Progress
	<p>Promote an amnesty for licensable HMOs - to raise awareness with Landlords as to the new license requirements and standards.</p>	<p>Amnesty promoted in the press and on the council's website</p>	<p>Complete (ongoing)</p>	
<p>We will maximise the use of the existing private housing stock including empty homes.</p>	<p>Increase the volume of reported/identified HMO properties through increased public awareness and proactive joint working with relevant agencies.</p> <p>Work with the owners of long-term empty homes, to support and encourage voluntary action to bring these homes back into use.</p> <p>Review data and intelligence on empty homes with internal partners, enabling targeted interventions e.g. planning, council tax, environmental health.</p> <p>Review the Empty Homes Strategy, working with the resources available, prioritising an informal approach.</p>	<p>Complete a public awareness campaign and evaluate its success</p> <p>Establish baseline number of long-term empty homes and measure success against this annually.</p> <p>Review progress across internal partners and co-ordinate information and interventions.</p> <p>Review the Strategy and develop approach and actions.</p>	<p>March 2019 (ongoing)</p> <p>March 2019 Annually</p> <p>Ongoing. Quarterly.</p> <p>April 2020</p>	  

What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of success	When will we do it	Progress
<p>We will work to prevent homelessness from the Private Rented Sector</p>	<p>Work with the housing options team to approach local landlords and letting agents to jointly look at ways of overcoming barriers to working with clients on low incomes.</p> <p>Develop a new landlord/agent offer, maximising the use of homeless prevention fund policy and working with neighbouring boroughs</p> <p>Support private tenants/homeless clients to quickly and effectively resolve housing issues, with a better understanding of housing standards and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Meetings arranged and barriers identified and addressed</p> <p>Consider with landlords and other authorities what incentives would encourage joint working</p> <p>Develop protocols with private landlords to identify those at risk of homelessness at early stage.</p>	<p>March 2019 (on going)</p> <p>November 2019</p> <p>November 2019</p>	
Partnerships				
<p>We will work in partnership to achieve our housing objectives, and channel internal and external resources to deliver this Strategy.</p>	<p>Work in partnership with neighbouring authorities under the Duty to Co-operate to strategically plan to meet our housing needs across the wider South Essex area and deliver a Joint Strategic Plan for South Essex in pursuit of the 2050 vision.</p> <p>Promote the Essex Homeless Memorandum of Understanding and use this to embed the Duty to Refer</p>	<p>First phase draft Joint Strategic Plan agreed</p> <p>Key partners signed up to the MOU and procedures in place for referrals</p>	<p>Spring 2020</p> <p>December 2019</p>	

What will we do	How will we do it	Measures of success	When will we do it	Progress
	<p>Develop relationships with our housing association partners in order to ensure our housing needs are met, delivering the right affordable homes in the right place at the right time.</p> <p>Continue to promote joint working and strong links with the private rented sector and explore any opportunities to develop a local private rental offer</p>	<p>Arrange Housing Association forums / Multi-partner meeting held to discuss affordable homes requirement and opportunities to develop.</p> <p>Review with neighbouring authorities the option to promote a new private rental offer</p>	<p>June 2019 (on going)</p> <p>September 2019</p>	 