

Test Valley Borough Council

Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025



Welcome to Test Valley Borough Council's Housing Strategy 2020-2025

“Growing the potential of people, to be able to live well and fulfil their aspirations”

Foreword by Cabinet Member for Housing & Environmental Health, Councillor Phil Bundy

“Home” may mean something different to each of us, but most would agree that decent and affordable homes contribute immeasurably to health and wellbeing. They are keystones; underpinning communities, supporting children to learn and grow, helping us develop a sense of security and belonging. Our homes impact how we view the world, reach out, aspire, and achieve.

And yet, for some, accessing a home may feel out of reach. For others, the provision of bricks and mortar does little to abate more deeply entrenched, deeply personal, challenges. For a few, their “home” may be a damaging experience; not least where there is abuse, addiction, neglect, or violence.

To address these issues, the Council has invested heavily in its front line housing services in recent years, and directed funding to our partners to ensure local people have someone to turn to when they are struggling. We have drawn down central government funding to tackle homelessness, and we have exceeded targets we

set ourselves to deliver new affordable housing. We have recently transformed the way we work with people, introducing strengths-based approaches that focus on advantage rather than disadvantage, and we will continue on a transformational journey, challenging ourselves to work in new ways. We will ensure we're providing modern services in these changing times.

In this strategy, as with our Corporate Plan, we commit to improving quality of life. Building on the considerable strengths of our borough, we will enable communities to thrive. We will work in partnership to deliver the right support, in the right place, at the right time, for those who need it; always encouraging greater self-assurance, self-confidence, self-esteem, and ultimately, self-reliance. This is a Housing Strategy that aims to lift the bar for everyone, but particularly, it will deliberately target help for those who may be struggling the most.

We spoke to over 2,000 people during the summer of 2018. And we listened. Housing is a priority for our residents. As a result, we have undertaken a fresh and comprehensive review of evidence. From our consultation, our research, and our analysis, four overarching themes have emerged. They will frame our strategic approach.

We will:



Enable the delivery of new homes that people can afford and meet different types of need in our communities



Improve access to and quality of existing housing



Meet the challenge of an ageing population



Prevent & relieve homelessness and rough sleeping

This is an important strategy, setting out our priorities for the next 5 years and beyond. I hope that you will join me and support our ambitions. We are clear that we want to build on success, so that people can live well and fulfil their aspirations.

I am very pleased to endorse this new Housing Strategy on behalf of Test Valley Borough Council.

Councillor Phil Bundy
Cabinet Member for Housing & Environmental Health

Introduction

Test Valley is an attractive, mainly rural borough on the western side of Hampshire, bordering Southampton to the south and Newbury to the north. Projections suggest the population of Test Valley will increase over the next 20 years, and that proportionately, the older population will grow most significantly. The majority of working age residents are economically active, and median earnings exceed south east and national levels.

With a local commitment to economic prosperity, including 'being open for business', there is much to celebrate about the affluence we enjoy in Test Valley. The buoyancy of the housing market is a testament to that prosperity; average house prices increased by over 22% between 2014 and 2018. Yet this buoyancy and prosperity can mask issues affecting our communities. Particularly those affecting people on low incomes or who may be vulnerable.

Against a backdrop of relative prosperity, there remain pockets of deprivation in parts of the borough. There are barriers to accessing services for some residents, often associated with the expansive rural character of the area. It is also true that within areas of relative affluence (and perhaps most strikingly, in our picturesque rural villages) housing costs are preclusive for newly forming households. The housing market is strong and this is positive, but it also means it is competitive and expensive. Unchecked, there are risks that our local housing market will exclude



increasing numbers of people from accessing a decent home.

Housing is, therefore, in its broadest sense, a fundamental issue for the Council and its residents. Every resident should have access to a decent home they are able to afford. Poor or unsuitable housing impacts negatively on people's lives such that, without decent housing, all aspects of life become more difficult and less manageable and our communities become less sustainable. The area needs housing of all different tenures and types, to meet a range of needs, and to ensure our residents can achieve their housing aspirations.

This strategy has been developed in this context, and with due regard to the Council's overarching Revised Local Plan. The Local Plan considers overall housing supply in the area, including the provision of new affordable housing. Test Valley's Local Plan is ambitious, such that Local Plan requirements between 2020 and 2029 are to build a minimum of 5,292 new homes and with a policy aim to achieve 40% on site affordable housing delivery wherever it is possible to do so.

The Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025 is a high level plan that sets the course for our services to develop in partnership in the coming years, whilst drilling down into those priorities to provide a detailed roadmap that will enable us to achieve our aims. It sets out our vision for housing, with inclusive actions the Council and partners will

deliver and that are designed to ensure we meet the housing aspirations of our residents.

The Council is a non-stock holding local authority, having transferred its housing stock in the year 2000 to Testway Housing Association (now Aster Housing). The Council has retained its strategic housing responsibilities and continues to act as the enabler of affordable housing in the borough. It also delivers a range of vital services within a complex legal framework, including housing allocations and homelessness support, aids and adaptations, and ensuring decent housing standards.

This strategy is intended to act as a guide for investment and a framework for project management, meeting locally identified needs, including the wider support needs that contribute to individual housing crises. It is aligned to various health and wellbeing priorities, at a national, sub-regional, and local level, because good housing is a proven determinant of healthy communities. The success of this strategy will have a direct bearing on the health and wellbeing



of our borough and will contribute to reduced costs to the National Health Service and other parts of the wider system of public services.

This strategy also has close links to the Council's Economic Development Strategy, in the context of supporting people to reach their goals through active and meaningful occupational engagement in jobs and training.

The Council holds the values of accountability, ambition, empowerment, integrity and inclusiveness at its heart, and the Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025 embodies these values

at its core. They flow through every aspect of the strategy and not least the commitment to ensuring bricks and mortar are not the sole focus of our work. We recognise the importance of working with people to identify their strengths, encouraging them to succeed. In this context, addressing the needs of residents and communities holistically, sustainably, and with the involvement, ownership and help of those we are supporting, will be part of the ethos of our work to deliver the strategy over the next 5 years.

Policy and context

The Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025 has been developed with regard to a highly complex network of established and emerging national and local policy, and a range of complex legal duties and powers. This has been summarised in some detail within the Housing Strategy Evidence Base & Review of Homelessness, which can be downloaded from the Council's website here: www.testvalley.gov.uk.

Key National Housing Priorities:

Housing remains at the top of the political agenda and a key feature of political debate. Key priorities nationally include:

- Delivering more housing in the broadest sense to meet demand.
- Delivering more affordable housing, including different rented products and support for first time buyers.
- Developing strategic partnerships with ambitious developing landlords, including support for increased levels of social rented housing.
- Reforming the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Welfare reform and the national roll out of Universal Credit.



- Health and safety in the social housing sector following the tragic Grenfell Tower disaster in June 2017.
- Tackling criminal landlords and improving standards in the Private Rented Sector.
- Preventing and relieving homelessness in all its forms.
- Tackling street homelessness to end rough sleeping.

The national agenda in the context of housing policy is complex. Housing policy has interdependencies with a range of other areas of emerging policy such as welfare and economics. Changes in other areas of policy and law can impact directly on housing delivery, affordability and homelessness. Housing is likely to remain a complex and fast paced policy area for the foreseeable future.

Key Local Priorities:

In April 2019, the Council published a new Corporate Plan, "Growing Our Potential". The Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025 has been developed in this context.

In the Corporate Plan 2019 to 2023, the Council has set out its intention to invest to ensure it is actively:

- Working with communities and partners to help identify and deliver the supply of homes which reflects current and future housing need.
- Taking a positive approach to supporting those who are most vulnerable. Enabling people to build upon their strengths to address the underlying causes of their housing need. Improving outcomes and support available for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

- Creating communities that have the infrastructure and accessibility to meet the needs of a changing and growing population. Establishing attractive, sustainable and vibrant communities for people to live, work and enjoy.
- Supporting the growth and quality of employment in Test Valley to enable people to fulfil their aspirations. Addressing barriers within the current and future workforce such as raising aspirations, skills, and access to opportunities. Increase the variety of jobs available so that people can earn and live well.

In addition to the Corporate Plan, in August 2019 the Council declared a “Climate Emergency”. The Housing Strategy will include actions with a view to contributing to reducing carbon emissions.



Test Valley's other related policies and strategies include:

- The Corporate Equality Objectives 2019 to 2023
- The Local Plan, including related Affordable Housing Policies and Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document
- The Economic Development Strategy
- The Affordable Housing Grants Policy
- The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy
- The Tenancy Strategy
- The Empty Homes Policy
- The Private Sector Renewal Policy
- The Home Energy Conservation Act Action Plan

- The No Second Night Out Procedure
- The Private Rented Sector Offer Policy
- The Allocations Policy & Hampshire Home Choice Based Lettings Process
- The Core Values
- The Test Valley Partnership
- The Climate Emergency Declaration and associated work streams

The Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025 will be delivered within a wider, interconnected, policy context. This includes initiatives at County level and across partnerships. It is anticipated that external policy initiatives will make a positive contribution to the Housing Strategy, whilst the strategy itself will make significant contributions to meeting a range of external agencies' priorities.

Key facts and figures: the evidence base

The Council has undertaken an extensive piece of work to gather and analyse evidence to inform the Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025 and the Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 to 2023. This included comprehensive data analysis and wide ranging consultation. The full body of evidence can be downloaded from the Council's website at www.testvalley.gov.uk.

Key headlines arising from the review include:

- Demographic projections suggest a 13% increase in population by 2041, with the most prevalent age groups predicted to be 45-54 and 75-84 (the latter predicted to increase from 11% in 2016 to 18% of the population in 2041).
- Over 83% of residents are economically active with median earnings of £33,356 representing a higher level than regional and national medians.
- House prices have been increasing in the area with a 22% increase in the average house price between 2014 and 2018. The ratio of lower quartile house price to lower quartile gross earnings has correspondingly increased such that it is now 10 times the average earnings in Test Valley.



- Over the past 6 financial years, in total the Council has exceeded its affordable housing delivery target by 20%, enabling 1,441 units of new affordable housing.
- During the same period, only 12 units of rural exception scheme housing were delivered.
- The average customer seeking shared ownership in Test Valley is 37 years old, earns £33,221, and has savings of £19,409.
- The Council's Housing Register has approximately 2,000 households registered, and 89% of those registered earn less than £30,000 per annum.
- Approximately 71% of those of working age registered on the Housing Register are in work.
- On average, over the last 5 years, the Council nominated 498 households from the Housing Register to housing association homes per annum. Of those, it is estimated 22% were nominated to first lets in new build properties while the remaining 78% were re-lets within the existing housing association stock.
- The local rented housing market has become increasingly expensive, including the social housing sector, and the proportion of net income required to cover housing costs for low income households has increased.
- The borough has seen a declining trend in the delivery of 'social rented' housing and an increasing trend in 'affordable rented' units being delivered on new development sites.

- On average, the Council processed 95 Disabled Facilities Grants a year over the past 3 years, with a spend across that period of £1.9M.
- 11 mandatory Houses in Multiple Occupation licences were issued in the first 6 months of 2019/20 (where only 1 was issued the previous year).
- The take up of discretionary home improvement grants and loans has been low over the past 5 years.
- Demand for Housing Services has increased considerably since April 2018.
- The main causes of homelessness are family or friend evictions (26%), end of private rented sector tenancies (25%), relationship breakdown (15%), end of housing association tenancies (15%) and domestic abuse (7%).
- The Council is reliant on the rented sector (private, social, and supported housing) to meet homelessness demand.



- Only 22% of cases triggering the duty to prevent homelessness were successfully supported to remain in their existing accommodation.
- Despite high demand, the Council has successfully reduced main duty homelessness acceptances and temporary accommodation use.
- In 2018, the Council experienced a spike in rough sleeping levels, with the official estimate for autumn that year identifying 9 individuals who were sleeping rough. This had reduced to 6 individuals in autumn 2019.

- 34% of all cases triggering homelessness duties had a support need associated with a history of poor mental health at initial assessment, and many households were assessed as having multiple support needs.

The evidence base is extensive, yet it should not be considered exhaustive. Other existing research and earlier consultations have also been used to inform this strategy and further research and analysis will be undertaken throughout the delivery period.

Our priorities



Enabling the delivery of new homes that people can afford and meeting different types of need in our communities



Improving access to and quality of existing housing



Meeting the challenge of an ageing population



Preventing & relieving homelessness and rough sleeping



Theme 1: Enabling the delivery of new homes that people can afford and meeting different types of need in our communities

Whilst providing bricks and mortar is fundamentally important, Theme 1 is about more than that. It is about working in partnership to help people to adapt, cope and thrive.



Identified Priorities:

- Deliver 1,000 high quality, suitable and affordable homes throughout the borough between 2020 and 2025.
- Work with local communities and Parish Councils to deliver affordable housing in rural areas, including through Rural Exception Housing schemes and community led development.
- Ensure that affordable housing meets identified local needs in the context of property type, costs and tenure.
- Encourage the development of energy efficient affordable homes to reduce carbon emissions and reduce household heating costs.
- Ensure support is available for a range of needs, including supported housing.
- Ensure alternative housing options are available for people with mobility needs and those affected by physical disabilities where they may be required.

How We Will Deliver:

- Negotiate the delivery of onsite affordable housing contributions wherever possible, within Local Plan targets, subject to viability.
- Deliver an appropriate mix of new affordable housing in the borough based on locally identified need, ensuring a range of tenure options are available.
- Support the Council's ambitions for town centres in the context of residential homes.
- Undertake satisfaction surveys with occupants of new affordable housing units on all new development sites to learn from their experience.
- Engage with the Hampshire rural housing partnership and actively work with parishes to promote and deliver rural exception and community led affordable housing.
- Support the development of Neighbourhood Plans and Community Led Development schemes, and provide information and feedback to support Parish and Town

Councils to develop the justification to ensure appropriate affordable housing provision is being considered and proposed.

- Adopt an updated Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document to complement existing Local Plan policies and set out clear expectations and parameters.
- Actively promote and encourage new affordable housing that incorporates ecologically friendly features and design, working with developers and Registered Providers.
- Work creatively with Registered Providers, including government Strategic Housing Partners and Homes England, to draw down investment to deliver more affordable homes including more social rented homes.
- Introduce a requirement for a percentage of social rented homes to be delivered on new sites, dependent on suitability.
- Promote with Registered Providers the potential for grant funding to be made available by the Council from Section 106 contributions, to develop collaborative approaches and deliver new projects in partnership.



- Continue to monitor the affordability of rented homes in Test Valley.
- Work in partnership with Hampshire County Council, Registered Providers and the Voluntary and Community Sectors to maximise investment in, and access to, appropriate housing related support options.
- Develop an in house Resettlement Support Service and continue to build on strengths-based approaches with participation from the wider system of public services.
- Work with Hampshire County Council to identify people who may benefit from bespoke affordable homes to meet specific needs, that may otherwise be difficult to adequately meet within the existing housing stock.
- Encourage the development of new housing which is suitable for disabled people and encourage higher accessibility standards using the Affordable Housing SPD and Part M of building regulations.
- Review temporary accommodation options to ensure availability of wheelchair accessible units in the local area.



Theme 2: Improving access to and quality of existing housing

The Council will explore how it can make the most of existing housing stock in the borough, and review ways in which we can improve access to both housing services and to existing housing. The Council will actively promote high standards in private and social housing, including energy efficiency standards, and where appropriate, take robust enforcement action to ensure minimum standards are being met, particularly as they relate to housing health and safety.



Identified Priorities:

- Explore different ways to make the Council's Housing Services accessible for people who need them most.
- Ensure that those who are least able to afford market housing are supported to access a decent and affordable home that meets their needs.
- Work in partnership with the Private Rented Sector to increase the available supply of rented homes to meet local needs and work with landlords and their agents to provide opportunities for them to learn and network.
- Actively promote high standards in the rented sector and take appropriate action where those standards are not being met.
- Support people with disabilities to remain in their homes through the provision of aids and adaptations and make effective use of the Better Care Fund to meet local need.

- Promote energy efficiency in residential homes, the Council's Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Action Plan initiatives, and actively support local people to access Energy Company Obligation funding.
- Bring problematic empty homes back into use.

How We Will Deliver:

- Develop the service map for the borough to inform a revised directory of services.
- Work with a range of partners to deliver place-based events to promote initiatives, including affordable home ownership and other targeted opportunities, and facilitate improved access to services and greater awareness of available help.
- Monitor and review the Allocations Policy to ensure it meets all legal requirements and strikes the right 'balance of needs', whilst investigating ways to ensure those most exposed to local affordability challenges have a realistic prospect of securing a home.

- Review the available options for single people and identify how to meet their needs now and in the future.
- Deliver the government funded Private Rented Sector Access Project, including developing an in-house 'Social Lettings Agency' model.
- Support and encourage new, high quality and well managed, Houses in Multiple Occupation in the local area, whilst licensing all HMOs that are subject to mandatory licensing.
- Monitor standards in the rented sector and take robust enforcement action where necessary to tackle disrepair, poor housing conditions and criminal landlords.
- Deliver Private Rented Sector Landlords' & Letting Agents' Forums and other networking opportunities for private landlords; promoting the events widely and using them to consult the Private Rented Sector on the issues that are affecting them.



- Promote, deliver and review the Council's Private Sector Renewal Policy to ensure it is making a positive difference to people's lives and meeting locally identified need.
- Ensure the Private Rented Sector meets the requirements of the Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England & Wales) Regulations 2015.
- Review and promote initiatives contained in the Council's HECA action plan.
- Deliver targeted promotion about energy efficiency in domestic homes in rural areas and at rural events.
- Provide an effective and efficient Disabled Facilities Grant process including promoting the grants programme to ensure all those entitled to support are accessing services.
- Work with Registered Providers to deliver low cost aids and adaptations in their housing stock to support their tenants, and develop improvements in the recording and identification of adapted units within the existing affordable housing stock.
- Develop and update the Council's approach to bringing problematic long term empty properties in the borough back into use.
- Ensure that victims of domestic abuse are able to access services and support, and that they are able to remain in their homes where it is appropriate for them to do so, working with the Hampshire Making Safe partnership and local domestic abuse services.





Theme 3: Meeting the challenge of an ageing population

With a growing proportion of older people within the borough's population, it is vital that we understand the housing aspirations and housing needs of older persons, and plan to meet them.

Identified Priorities:

- Understand the housing aspirations of people aged 55 and over, who may be eligible for older persons housing.
- Understand local need in partnership with Hampshire County Council, to establish demand and identify opportunities for future schemes.
- Ensure new affordable housing for older people adequately meets future needs (including mobility needs and issues such as dementia), in locations close to local amenities, and of a design and type that is attractive to older people.



- Develop a range of alternative housing options for older persons, actively encouraging downsizing to free up family homes.

How We Will Deliver:

- In partnership, review the housing needs of older people in Test Valley, including an exploration of the barriers to downsizing.
- Conduct satisfaction surveys with residents of older person's housing in the borough.
- Work with partners to deliver events that promote affordable housing options for older people and to seek their views, including understanding their housing aspirations.
- Investigate good practice elsewhere; including where schemes may have been delivered for a mix of ages and household types, successfully integrating older persons housing into a mixed community.
- Work with Registered Providers to identify, and then consult, tenants who are under-occupying affordable homes by 2 or more bedrooms, to understand what would encourage them to move to a smaller home.
- Identify opportunities on new development sites to deliver a small proportion of bungalows that could be ring-fenced for people who are downsizing from family sized affordable homes in Test Valley.
- Review the mix of housing needed in the borough as part of the next Revised Local Plan.
- Review potential for an Extra Care Scheme in Andover town centre to support a mixed and vibrant community as part of future regeneration.
- Work with partners to deliver and allocate Extra Care homes at the Nightingale Lodge scheme in Romsey.



Theme 4: Preventing & relieving homelessness and rough sleeping

Preventing and relieving homelessness and rough sleeping is a priority for the Council. Theme 4 will be delivered in partnership, and it will be subject to a stand-alone strategy that sets out how the Council will deliver.

Identified Priorities:

- Improving health & wellbeing, building on skills, empowering communities to thrive.
- Driving innovation across the local system of public services through effective partnership arrangements.
- Supporting people to remain in their homes, or to move into the right accommodation at the right time.
- Developing local partnerships to ensure no-one has to sleep rough in Test Valley.



How We Will Deliver:

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires that local housing authorities undertake periodic homelessness reviews at least every 5 years, and that they publish strategies that set out how they will prevent homelessness based on the results of these reviews.

The Council has undertaken a comprehensive review of homelessness as part of the wider Housing Strategy Evidence Base and this can be downloaded from the Council's website at www.testvalley.gov.uk.

The Council is publishing a separate Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy which will include a detailed delivery plan setting out the way in which it will deliver against this Housing Strategy priority. The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy has been developed in parallel to, and dovetails with, the aims of the Housing Strategy; building on the work the Council has undertaken in partnership since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy feeds directly into the Housing Strategy and can be downloaded from the Council's website at www.testvalley.gov.uk.

Resources

The Council's resources are limited. This strategy represents a contribution to a cross-cutting agenda and will meet a range of priorities across the public sector, including those associated with economic activity, health, criminal justice and social care. The strategy can only be delivered successfully in partnership, working alongside the private, public, community and voluntary sectors.

In terms of delivering on the Housing Strategy priorities, the Council's housing related functions are delivered through a mix of council tax and central government grant funding, along with funding from the Department of Work & Pensions through rebates and Discretionary Housing Payment funding.

The Council also maintains a capital programme and receives developer contributions in lieu of onsite affordable housing contributions, and capital receipts resulting from the Right to Buy (the Council retains a proportion of all Right to Buy receipts resulting from tenants exercising the Right to Buy and who were Council tenants at the time of the stock transfer in 2000).

The Council delivers the Disabled Facilities Grant Programme using allocated Better Care Fund resources and also benefits from Hampshire County Council's Children's Services' and Adult Services' commissioned housing support pathways in the area.

In addition to the resources identified above, the Council continues to work closely with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure it is well placed to secure additional short term funding from any housing related bid rounds, particularly when it is clear it will directly contribute to our strategic aims.

Monitoring & updating the strategy

This strategy has been developed in partnership, including with our service users, and sets out a 5 year plan. During this period, new priorities may emerge and new national policy landscapes may be introduced. Whilst we can anticipate that key themes will remain relevant during this period, the way we deliver them may need to change.

It is likely that each of the strategic themes will stand the test of time during the life of the strategy, as a result of the level of analysis and consultation that informed them. The enabling affordable housing theme is nominally aligned to the life of the Local Plan, while the others are unlikely to be entirely resolved during the life of this strategy alone.

For these reasons, it is important that the Housing Strategy remains under review and that it is kept up to date.

The Delivery Plan is intended to be a live document, to be updated as necessary and as actions are completed and the plan evolves. An updated version of the action plan will be published on the Council's website and shared with our partners in spring each year, setting out the achievements and the challenges of

the preceding financial year, along with any significant recommended changes to the action plan that may arise from emerging demand, guidance, legislation or policy.

Additionally, the Strategy will be overseen by the multi-agency Preventing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Forum, the Private Landlords' & Letting Agents' Forum, and the Registered Provider Forum. These groups will act as critical friends based on their areas of interest and responsibility, partnering the Council in the delivery of its strategic plans.

Service User Focus Groups will, periodically, help monitor our progress and keep the strategy in touch with the lived experience of our customers.

Multi-Agency Task and Targeting Steering Groups will be developed to oversee specific elements of the Delivery Plan and to take ownership of meeting certain priorities.

The Council's Housing & Environmental Health Service will brief Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSCOM) annually regarding the operations of the Housing Service.

The delivery plan

This strategy is deliberately focused on action. The Delivery Plan sets out specific, measurable, achievable and time-phased (SMART) actions that contribute to meeting the overarching aims. The approach to monitoring and review ensures that in addition to SMART actions and targets, there will be regular evaluation and review (SMARTER).

The Delivery Plan has been developed around the key priorities and themes identified in the evidence base and that have been developed through consultation. It is a live document and will be subject to change during the life of the Strategy.