



## Report to Council

<b>Date:</b>	<b>17 April 2024</b>
<b>Reference number:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Buckinghamshire Housing Strategy 2024-2029</b>
<b>Cabinet Member(s):</b>	Councillor Mark Winn, Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory Services
<b>Contact officer:</b>	Lisa Michelson – Service Director
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	None specific
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>It is recommended that Council note the responses to the consultation exercises and approves the adoption of the Buckinghamshire Housing Strategy 2024-2029.</b>
<b>Reason for decision:</b>	The housing strategy is a major place strategy for Buckinghamshire. It sets out the council's priorities for housing as they relate to delivering the council's statutory duties, increasing the level of affordable housing, and ensuring suitable housing conditions. It is the council's role as the housing authority to set the strategic direction for Buckinghamshire.

### **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 Development of the Buckinghamshire Housing Strategy began in took place in Spring and Summer of 2023. A public and stakeholder consultation on the housing strategy was conducted between 8 November 2023 and 18 January 2024. Consultation exercises also included two all member briefings which took place on 6 November 2023 and discussions at the 14 December 2023 Growth Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee meeting. The Buckinghamshire Housing Strategy has also been presented to Buckinghamshire's Growth Board.

- 1.2 The responses to the consultation exercises have indicated that there is broad agreement of the vision, the three priorities, and the critical success factors.
- 1.3 Changes to the housing strategy arising from the consultation exercises (detailed in Appendix 2) have been incorporated in the final version which is Appendix 5 to this report.

## **2. The Buckinghamshire Housing Strategy 2024-2029**

- 2.1 The Buckinghamshire Housing Strategy has been devised for the five-year period 2024 to 2029. The vision for the housing strategy is:

*A strong housing offer that provides affordable, accessible, sustainable and suitable choices are all life stages.*

- 2.2 The three strategic priorities for the housing strategy are:

- Priority One - Understanding the housing needs of our diverse population.
- Priority Two - Better Homes: good quality, sustainable and matched to need.
- Priority Three - New Homes: affordable, accessible and appropriate.

- 2.3 The Critical Success Factors for each of the priorities are:

- i) Understanding the housing needs of our diverse population – we will:

- Understand the housing issues and needs.
- Enable the fair, consistent and allocation of tenancies for affordable housing via Bucks Home Choice Register.
- Adopt an effective and proactive approach to address Temporary Accommodation (TA) and homelessness increases in number of placements and costs.
- Identify, specify, and deliver housing options for groups with particular needs.

- ii) Better Homes: good quality, sustainable and matched to need – we will:

- Ensure that Registered Providers are actively maintaining and improving the quality of their homes.
- Ensure that the Private Rented Sector maintains and improves the quality of rental properties.
- Work to ensure that best use is made of existing social housing.
- Improve the accessibility of new and existing homes.

- iii) New Homes: affordable, accessible and appropriate – we will:

- Support and enable Registered Providers to deliver new affordable homes, including for those with special needs.
- Explore the use of local authority assets and resources for the purposes of delivering additional new housing.  
Ensure that residential development (including affordable housing) is considered in regeneration strategies, and in brownfield and redevelopment proposals for mixed use developments where appropriate.

2.4 A public and stakeholder consultation on the housing strategy took place between 8 November 2023 and 18 January 2024. The consultation was carried out via [YourVoiceBucks](#) and through the housing strategy consultation.

2.5 Responses to the public consultation consisted of the following:

- 161 respondents, of whom 135 were individuals and 26 were responding on behalf of an organisation,
- 69% of respondents were aged 55 or over, while less than 9% were aged 35 or under,
- 73% of the respondents were owner-occupiers, with the majority being members of households who own their homes outright. 6% rented privately and 4% rented from a social landlord,
- 40% of individual respondents were retired and 46% work either full-time or part-time,
- Most individual respondents were White British (although this question had a poor response rate, with a quarter choosing not to answer),
- The number of respondents was too low to enable a breakdown of views by any demographic or geographic categories.

2.6 There was a high rate of approval for the three priorities in the housing strategy.

2.7 In reviewing the responses, a number of themes emerged:

- i) There is a need to prioritise affordable housing delivery in Buckinghamshire. How can more affordable homes be achieved?
- ii) Alongside new house building there is a need to ensure other priority infrastructure is developed such as transport, schools, health services and roads,
- iii) For Priority 3, *New homes: affordable, accessible and appropriate*, there were a number of comments raising climate change issues associated with construction and population growth.

- iv) There are concerns about the need to protect green space from residential development,
- v) The emphasis on the quality of new homes with regard to construction standards, design, and energy efficiency is important.
- vi) The strategy needs to be clear about housing for priority vulnerable groups such as older people and care leavers etc.

2.8 In addition, there were three notable suggestions for policy change in the strategy, which were raised in the consultation:

- i) *A specific Buckinghamshire affordable housing definition should be devised.*

Our response: This was considered but is not recommended.

The National Planning Policy Framework definition of Affordable Housing is a nationally accepted and recognised definition produced by the Government. To adopt a Buckinghamshire specific one would leave Buckinghamshire Council vulnerable to legal challenge. Developers and other parties may use a local definition as a means to brand certain housing delivery models as 'affordable' which do not meet the local needs in Buckinghamshire.

- ii) *Buckinghamshire Council should create its own housing development company to develop affordable housing in Buckinghamshire.*

Our response: The creation of a new housing development company would represent a reversal of legacy decision-making that stretches back many years and would require a substantial level of capital investment and associated risk. To understand this option, legal advice has been commissioned and will be available in the Spring 2024. A review of this advice and further discussion of this option will take place at this time. In the meanwhile, the strategy does not preclude the council pursuing the option of creating its own housing development company if that was a decision taken at some point in the future.

- iii) *The target for delivery of 500 new affordable homes per year is not ambitious enough.*

Our response: The housing market in Buckinghamshire is challenging, and delivery of affordable housing is difficult given financial constraints and other new requirements for quality of new housing build. The council works with Registered Providers and other developers to push affordable housing delivery volumes as high as possible. While a target of 500 new affordable homes per year is not sufficient to meet all the expected affordable housing needs in Buckinghamshire, this target has been reviewed through engagement with Registered Providers in the county and is assessed as

achievable. However, the target will be reviewed on an annual basis and updated if appropriate.

### **3. Other options considered**

3.1 **Not to produce a Housing Strategy for Buckinghamshire** – This is not recommended. The strategy supports the council’s role as setting the strategic direction for housing. The strategy also enables clarity and coordination between the council and delivery partners.

### **4. Legal and financial implications**

4.1 Although there is no legal obligation upon local authorities to produce a housing strategy, it is relevant to the following legislation:

- Housing Act 1996 – legal obligations for the allocation of social housing and assisting households who are potentially or have become homeless.
- Homelessness Act 2002 – a legal obligation to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping review and strategy.
- Housing Act 2004 – improvement of private sector housing conditions.
- Localism Act 2011 – a legal obligation to produce a Tenancy Strategy.
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 – a legal obligation upon local authorities to prevent or relief homelessness.

4.2 Many of the actions within the Housing Strategy will be delivered within the council’s existing MTFP budgets for Housing. These are:

<b>Expenditure Budgets £k</b>	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>2025-26</b>	<b>2026-27</b>	<b>2027-28</b>
Revenue Budget	11,244	10,357	10,357	
Capital Programme Budget	10,824	5,596	5,596	4,066

4.3 The exceptions to this are where affordable housing is delivered by Developers (through s.106 planning requirements) and where Registered Providers are leading on the delivery of affordable housing using their own funding sources.

4.4 A full list of actions with their funding sources is included in Appendix 3.

#### **4a Director of Legal & Democratic Services Comment**

The Director has read and noted the report.

#### **4b Section 151 Officer Comment**

The Housing Strategy will be delivered within existing MTFP budgets, through the Planning regime, and through partnership working with Registered Providers.

## **5. Corporate implications**

- iv) Property – The housing strategy includes broad content and recommended actions relating the potential use of council-owned property and assets to support the delivery of affordable housing. Any decisions on assets are not included in the strategy and would be subject to business case development and other governance.
- v) Human Resources – The housing strategy is a strategic document for use with stakeholders and partners, any involvement on this strategy for officers/teams are part of normal business as usual.
- vi) Climate change – The housing strategy sets out priorities for good quality and energy efficient new homes and improving conditions of existing housing stock. The strategy also sets out council expectations which will influence new house building requirements in the local plan and other key council strategies such as the Buckinghamshire Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy 2021.
- vii) Sustainability – The housing strategy sets out priorities for good quality and energy efficient new homes and improving conditions of existing housing stock. The strategy also sets out council expectations which will influence new house building requirements in the local plan and other key council strategies such as the Buckinghamshire Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy 2021.
- viii) Equality – An Equality Assessment has been produced.
- ix) Data – The housing strategy utilises publicly available data.
- x) Value for money – Individual projects, resulting from the strategy, will be considered for ‘value for money’ on a case by case basis e.g. through the development of a business case.

## **6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views**

- 6.1 Two All-Member briefings took place on Monday 6 November 2023 and were well-attended by local members. The Housing Strategy was considered at the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2023. Written feedback has been provided to all questions which were posed at these meetings.

## **7. Communication, engagement & further consultation**

- 7.1 The draft Buckinghamshire Housing Strategy 2024-2029 has been drawn up from engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and partners. Initially a series of workshops were held in the Autumn of 2022 to explore the priorities and the actions which should be included. This report contains details of the additional consultation exercises which have taken place between 8 November 2023 and 18 January 2024.
- 7.2 In addition, a wide range of sources have been used to provide information on housing need and condition in Buckinghamshire, including the Census 2021, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) data, Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, and Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) information on earnings.

## **8. Background papers**

- 8.1 Appendix One: Information on the internal teams and external partner organisations who were consulted and the methods by which they were consulted.
- 8.2 Appendix Two: Buckinghamshire Council Housing Strategy Actions 2024-2029 – cost implications
- 8.3 Appendix Three: Analysis of the Consultation results
- 8.4 Appendix Four: The Updated Buckinghamshire Housing Strategy 2024-2029, reflecting the findings of the consultation exercises.

## **9. Your questions and views (for key decisions)**

- 9.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider, please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by email to [democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk).