

Coventry Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2013-18: Summary



Introduction

The Housing & Homelessness Strategy sets out our vision, priorities and actions for meeting the housing needs of residents in Coventry now and over the next five years. Until now the Council has approached homelessness through a separate strategy and plan. This Strategy is different because we have combined our housing and homelessness strategies into a single document. This approach means that the Homelessness Strategy can be read as 'part of the bigger picture' within Coventry's wider Housing Strategy and is not seen in isolation from the range of other housing factors that influence homelessness. Our ambition for the City is:

'To ensure decent homes, housing choice and support for Coventry citizens.'

Our Housing & Homelessness Strategy is supported by the following documents:

- The Coventry Context and Homelessness Review.
- Results of Consultation.

What has changed since the last Housing Strategy?

Since the last strategy was produced, a Coalition Government was formed in 2010. This has been followed by the most radical shake-up of housing policy and investment for a generation. The Coalition has introduced different ideas about the way central and local government relate to each other, about giving greater control to local communities and has brought in a number of changes to housing and homelessness. In addition, we have also undertaken a fundamental service review of the Council's Housing Service. These changes have influenced the development of the new Strategy.

The Strategy also takes account of other influential factors including national and local policies and legislation, as well as housing market intelligence. The evidence base is contained in the supporting document 'The Coventry Context,' alongside the 'Homelessness Review.'

How did we develop the Strategy?

In developing the Strategy we took into account the views and interests of a wide range of people, groups and organisations. We consulted through a variety of means, in stages, over the last couple of years. Our consultation and engagement was designed to be as innovative and creative as possible. We used traditional methods such as focus groups and round table discussions and we engaged with local people in the city centre using competitions, suggestion boxes, pin boards and video booths. Details of the results of the consultation are in the supporting document, 'Results of Consultation'.

Engaging creatively with our citizens



Our key themes, priorities, challenges and actions at a glance

Theme 1: Increase the supply, choice and quality of new housing.

Our priorities

- Optimise opportunities for increasing new affordable housing supply.
- Promote balanced and sustainable communities by diversifying the size, type and tenure of new affordable housing, particularly family sized housing.
- Develop new affordable housing to a high quality.
- Support economic growth by developing high value, high quality housing to retain higher earners and attract new residents.
- Regenerate neighbourhoods where poor quality, low demand housing exists.
- Improve existing site provision to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

The main challenges facing us in Coventry

Affordable Housing Need & Provision

- The population of Coventry is projected to grow and there is a substantial shortage of affordable housing.
- The amount of capital investment available nationally for new affordable housing has been reduced significantly.
- Over the last 12 years, the list of those seeking social housing has increased significantly whilst the social housing stock has declined as a result of the demolition of obsolete stock and tenants exercising their Right to Buy.
- There is a need for all types and sizes of housing in Coventry, however the most acute need is for larger family housing (3 & 4 bedroom properties).
- There is an identified need to refurbish or remodel the Council owned Gypsy and Traveller site.

Affordability

- A high proportion of households have insufficient income to afford entry level market housing.
- The difficulty in accessing mortgage finance coupled with the requirement for larger deposits has led to an inability for many potential First Time Buyers to purchase properties.

Housing Stock & Resident Workforce Imbalance

- Coventry has a high proportion of terraced homes compared to other areas in the country.
- Average house prices and values are comparatively lower in the City compared to neighbouring areas.
- There is a workforce who earn higher wages working within Coventry that don't live in the City and a number of high earners who move each year from Coventry to Rugby, Nuneaton & Bedworth or Warwick.

Pioneering new homes at Sampson Close - Passivhaus development (Orbit Housing Group)

This 23 unit scheme was the UK's largest Passivhaus development and the first social housing scheme in the Midlands to be Passivhaus certified. Orbit is working with Coventry University to monitor the effectiveness of the pioneering new homes. The environmentally friendly homes built using innovative energy efficient technologies will reduce residents' energy consumption and therefore their fuel bills.



What we will do – summary

- To support economic growth we will aim to meet our affordable housing target and keep the target under review.
- Explore alternative funding sources and methods to enable affordable housing developments.
- Contribute to diversifying the housing stock and meeting housing needs by achieving the right tenure, size and proportion of affordable housing on new developments.
- Negotiate to improve the percentage of larger family homes delivered as part of the Affordable Housing Requirement.
- Identify the market for aspirational housing and promote future housing sites where aspirational housing could be suitable.
- Explore a new partnership model for investment in housing development.
- Continue to support regeneration programmes in the City.
- Take a balanced approach to improving the design of new housing.
- Identify opportunities to assist First Time Buyers.
- Remodel the Siskin Drive Gypsy & Traveller site.
- Work with Planning to develop a new Supplementary Planning Document setting out guidance on affordable housing in the City.

Theme 2 – Prevent & Tackle Homelessness – Our Homelessness Strategy

Overarching Homelessness Priority: To deliver upon the challenges set out in the Government report 'Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness' (2012).

Our local priorities

- To establish a revised process for the assessment, allocation and procurement of temporary accommodation.
- To re-commission external homelessness services which better align with homelessness priorities.
- To review the local social housing allocation system – Coventry Homefinder.

The main challenges facing us in Coventry

- The combined impact of reforms to housing policy and welfare, as well as the recession could lead to an increase in homelessness.
- During 2011/12, 1146 households presented themselves as homeless to the Council and 576 were found to be homeless, eligible, in priority need and not intentionally homeless (known as 'Statutorily Homeless.')
- The majority of these households had dependent children.
- There was an increase in the number of households made homeless due to a private tenancy coming to an end.
- There are identified gaps in provision for women, clients with high/complex needs and households in temporary accommodation.
- There is a need to change the way temporary accommodation is used and procured due to duplication in processes, inconsistencies in the quality of accommodation and the financial cost to the Council.

- Current external homelessness contracts that provide additional services to homeless people also contain duplication in processes, assessments and administration.

What we will do – summary

- Work with partners to develop a new Coventry Homelessness Action Plan to respond to the ten preventing homelessness challenges set out by Government in 'Making Every Contact Count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness' (2012).
- Work with partners and other Council Directorates to establish a revised process for the assessment, allocation and procurement of temporary accommodation.
- Re-commission external homelessness services.
- Work with current social housing providers and wider stakeholders to carry out a review of Coventry Homefinder and the supporting Nominations and Lettings Policy.

Theme 3: Strive for a healthier and more sustainable City by improving the quality and use of existing housing

Our priorities

- Improve energy efficiency and affordable warmth across all tenures.
- Improve property condition and management standards in the private rented sector.
- Make best use of existing housing by reducing the number of empty properties and addressing under-occupation.

The main challenges facing us in Coventry

Stock Condition

- Ongoing reductions in public spending have significantly impacted on our ability to fund housing improvements in the private sector.
- An estimated 35% of private properties do not meet Decent Homes standards and an estimated 20% have a Category 1 hazard – the cost to remedy this is very high.
- Most non-decent homes are occupied by the elderly, people on low incomes or those that are economically vulnerable.
- There are an estimated 3,180 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) in the City, with an estimated 300 that are licensable HMOs.

Use of Housing Stock

- Many social housing tenants are under-occupying their property and at the same time there are many households who are living in overcrowded conditions.
- New benefit rules mean that from April 2013, working age social housing tenants considered to be under-occupying their homes will face a reduction in their Housing Benefit.
- In April 2012 there were 2,587 empty homes in the private sector, of which over half had been vacant for more than six months.

Energy Efficiency & Fuel Poverty

- In 2010, 21% of households in Coventry were in fuel poverty compared to the national average of 19% - this is much higher in certain neighbourhoods.
- Approximately 36% of the City's carbon dioxide emissions are from the housing stock.
- Over twenty thousand dwellings in the City have a Category 1 hazard and of these, over half had an excess cold hazard.
- A number of properties in the City have loft insulation below the current Building Regulations standard and un-insulated cavity walls or solid walls.

What we will do – summary

- Bring long-term empty private properties back into use and increase our target year on year.
- Work with the Council's Benefits Service and Registered Providers to increase the supply of larger family homes by addressing the issue of under occupation.
- Improve the condition of the existing stock by prioritising properties in the worst condition and assisting the most vulnerable people.
- Work with landlords and tenants to support the increasing role of the private rented sector to provide high quality, professionally managed accommodation.
- Aim to reduce energy bills and make homes warmer by identifying opportunities for installing energy efficiency and renewable energy measures and maximising funding from external sources.

Tackling empty properties – a wasted resource



Before



After

Theme 4: Encourage balanced, stable and sustainable communities.

Our priorities

- Support independent living for vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Improve housing choice for an ageing population.
- Improve the quality of our neighbourhoods to support safe, inclusive and cohesive communities.

The main challenges facing us in Coventry

- The number of people in Coventry aged over 55 is expected to increase by 30% between 2010 and 2030, with 64% growth predicted in the population aged over 85.
- The Council's budget is insufficient to meet the future predicted demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).
- Since its inception in April 2003, the former Supporting People budget (that funds housing related support services for vulnerable people), has reduced significantly.
- The number of working age people in employment in the City is lower than before the recession.
- A high proportion of people live in households in receipt of means-tested benefits.
- Several neighbourhoods in the City are amongst the most deprived in the country.
- During 2011/12 the number of reported crimes in the City was 25,734.

What we will do – summary

- Explore ways of increasing funding for DFGs and managing aids and adaptations to ensure resources are used effectively and maximised.
- Develop specialist accommodation and commission housing related support services to meet the needs of the City's most vulnerable and at risk client groups.
- Work with our partners to improve access to and take-up of money and debt advice and ensure customers receive their full entitlement to benefits.
- Empower residents to take more control in shaping our housing services.
- Promote and deliver activities to address worklessness, improve the skills base and maximise employment opportunities.
- Consider ways in which housing solutions can contribute to the priorities identified in the Coventry Community Safety Strategic Assessment.

Coventry Boot Camp – helping young people into jobs and education

Organisations including the Council, Whitefriars Housing, Midland Heart, Orbit Heart of England, West Midlands Fire Service and the West Midlands Police, are working together to help youngsters secure work or an education placement. The success of the Boot Camp has gained national recognition and as a result similar schemes are being considered across the country.



Keeping you informed of progress

We want to ensure that partners and local communities can keep in touch with what we are doing and have the ongoing opportunity to comment on and highlight issues as they arise. We will do this through regular bulletins which will be available on our website. This will allow partners to be involved in delivering our objectives and ensuring our targets and priorities continue to reflect local priorities.

It is our intention to keep the Housing & Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan under review throughout the five year period to reflect progress achieved and to enable us to respond to further changes to legislation or policy.



The Strategy contains a number of terms which may be unfamiliar to the reader. These terms are explained in the glossary appended to the full Housing & Homelessness Strategy.