



Stratford-on-Avon District Housing Strategy 2015–2021

Incorporating the Homelessness Strategy &
Private Sector Housing Strategy

If you find the text in this document difficult to read, it may be possible to supply it in a format better suited to your needs.

See the Council's website: www.stratford.gov.uk (Housing Strategy under A-Z) for copies of the following Stratford-on-Avon District Housing Strategy 2015-2021 documents:

- This Strategy
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Evidence Log including consultation and a review of homelessness

The Equality Impact Assessment will be reviewed within three years of the adoption of this Strategy or earlier if circumstances warrant it.

If you have any queries about this Strategy, or want more information, please telephone 01789 260842 or email: renata.mosz@stratford-dc.gov.uk

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Vision: A District of sustainable communities offering more people the opportunity to live independently in good quality housing of their choice.

Introduction

Stratford-on-Avon District has the highest house prices and private rents in the West Midlands. The affordability of housing is an issue but the District is a place where people want to live.

The population of the District is growing even though deaths exceed births. People who can afford housing choose to move into the District from other areas. Many are older people. Proportionately, far more older people live in the District than in Warwickshire and most of England. Younger households are leaving the District.

The rapidly ageing population is creating its own housing pressures. However, the housing needs of people under pensionable age who want to live in the District where they work, and where their families and friends live, are equally important.

The Housing Strategy 2015-2021 sets out actions to tackle both the affordability of accommodation and the other housing issues of concern to local people including improving existing housing and the provision of good advice, support and care. It incorporates the Homelessness Review and Strategy, and Private Sector Housing Strategy.

The Strategy covers all tenures including owner occupation, private rented accommodation and affordable housing. The Council does not own any housing; housing associations own all the affordable homes in the District.

An up to date housing strategy enables the Council and its partners to focus resources on what really matters to people and to achieve better value for money. Being clear about the strategic housing priorities in the District makes it easier for the Council and its partners to continue to attract external investment, as we can make a stronger case for any available funding.

The Strategy builds on the success of the previous housing strategy. It details how the Council and its partners will continue to work together to ensure that more people in the District get the housing, support and care that they need and choose.

The format of the Strategy reflects the fact that the most popular and used sections of the previous strategy were the action plan, and the evidence and consultation logs. Consequently, Housing Strategy 2015-2021 comprises three documents:

- This **Stratford-on-Avon District Housing Strategy 2015-2021** document, which summarises the main issues and includes an action plan.

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- An **Evidence Log including consultation and a review of homelessness** that describes the evidence that has been taken into account when drafting this Strategy. It includes statistics and sections on:
 - Consultation;
 - Population;
 - Households;
 - Tenure;
 - Cost of buying or renting a home;
 - Requirement for new housing;
 - Affordable housing;
 - Condition of the existing housing stock;
 - The Council’s Housing Waiting List (Home Choice Plus);
 - Homelessness;
 - Housing related support and specialised housing;
 - Hyperlinks to other strategies, research and information.
- An **Equality Impact Assessment** that was prepared with partners.

The vision and three aims of the Strategy are set out below.

Housing Strategy 2015-2021

Vision

A District of sustainable communities offering more people the opportunity to live independently in good quality housing of their choice.

Aim 1

To support communities including increasing the supply and choice of good quality affordable homes for local people.

Aim 2

To improve existing housing and help people to live as independently as possible.

Aim 3

To prevent homelessness and the harm caused by it.

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'High level' strategic actions in the Strategy action plan underpin the vision and aims. Implementation and operational actions are included in service plans or other strategies and policies that sit below this Strategy. The Strategy refers to and complements other strategies, plans and work streams, but it does not duplicate them.

The Strategy does not set a target for the number of new homes to be built in the District, or where those homes should be located. This is one of the main purposes of the Local Plan (the Core Strategy and associated policies).

The Council will monitor the implementation of the action plan every six months; this may include adding new actions. The information will be shared with partners.

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Key housing challenges in the District

- Ensuring that everyone has equal access to services is important. The District is large (979 square km) with a dispersed settlement pattern: almost four-fifths of the population live in rural areas.
- Around 73% of households in the District own their homes, 13% rent privately and 13% live in affordable (social) rented homes. The proportion of affordable rented homes is significantly lower in the District than in Warwickshire (14%) and England (18%).
- There is a shortage of affordable housing (i.e. regulated housing available to those who cannot afford full market prices). The latest assessment of District-wide housing needs points to an annual shortfall of 233 affordable homes.
- The median age across Stratford-on Avon District is 46 years (2011). This compares to a median age of 41 years in Warwickshire and 39 years in England. The number of older people in the District is projected to grow at a much faster rate than in Warwickshire or England, with particularly big increases in the number of people aged over 80 years.
 - House prices are high. In 2013, the mean house price was £293,000 and the ratio of mean house prices to incomes is 9.6. Generally, entry-level property prices are also out of reach of aspiring first time buyers. The ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings is 8.9.
 - Private rents are expensive but demand is high. In the year up to September 2014, the mean District rent was £818 per calendar month or £9,800 per year.
 - Very few private rented properties are affordable to people in receipt of housing benefit. Even if the properties are affordable, landlords often choose not to let them to people in receipt of housing benefit (whether working or not).
 - Some working households on low incomes cannot afford 'Affordable Rents' that are set at 80% of private rents.
- One of the main reasons for young people leaving the District is the lack of affordable accommodation.
- There is a need to improve existing homes and ensure that they are in good repair and warm because most people want to live independently and stay in their own homes for as long as possible.

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- Although expensive, privately rented accommodation is generally of good quality. However, some of the coldest and least energy efficient homes in the District are private rented homes.
- There is inadequate provision of housing, support and care for older people and other people who require specialised housing because they are vulnerable or at risk of homelessness.
- The cost of living, including housing costs, is an issue for many working and non-working households. To prevent homelessness, there is an ongoing need to support these households and deal with the impact of welfare reform.
- To help create a balanced and sustainable community in any new settlement included in the adopted Core Strategy we need to decide who will live there and then build the right affordable (and market) homes.

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How the Housing Strategy links with other strategies and work

This section outlines the main strategies, plan and work streams taken into account when drafting this Strategy. **The Evidence Log provides further examples.**

Whilst not detailed in this Strategy, it should be noted that housing associations continue to do extensive community work that benefits not just their own tenants but also many other people. Examples include financial advice, or employability and skills workshops that are open to anyone.

Stratford-on-Avon District Sustainable Community Strategy

Stratford District Partnership's *Improving the Quality of Life for everyone – a 2026 Vision for Stratford District* is the Sustainable Community Strategy for the District. It identifies a number of key challenges relevant to the Housing Strategy and sets 'housing' goals.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Corporate Strategy

The District Council's Corporate Strategy 2015 to 2019 seeks to ensure that its services meet the Council's Vision: *'Stratford-on-Avon District will be recognised as a place of opportunity and economic prosperity in order to provide a better quality of life for all who live, work and visit.'*

The Strategy has three objectives:

1. A flourishing local economy;
2. People and their environment;
3. Responsible community leadership.

A number of priorities support each objective. The two main housing priorities are:

- Facilitate the delivery of housing targets including working with developers to identify suitable land and locations for developments and ensuring 35% affordable housing provision.
- Supporting vulnerable people especially those becoming homeless, those adjusting to benefit changes and those needing supported accommodation.

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Local Plan

The Local Plan is the plan for the future development of the District. It includes the District Council's Core Strategy 2011-2031, which determines the overall level, location and nature of new market and affordable housing, employment and other land uses in the District.

The Council's submission version Core Strategy 2011-2031 identifies a need for 11,300 additional homes (565 dwellings per annum). The Coventry & Warwickshire Joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment: Market Review 2013 states there is an annual shortfall of 233 additional affordable homes. A policy in the Core Strategy requires 35% of homes on eligible sites to be affordable homes.

Other planning documents will accompany the Core Strategy and provide detailed advice and planning guidance. A number of Parish Councils are preparing Neighbourhood Plans.

South Warwickshire Community Safety Partnership Plan

The South Warwickshire Community Safety Partnership Plan (April 2014 to March 2017) is the crime and disorder strategy for this area. The priorities in the plan are

1. Violence;
2. Anti-social behaviour (including the new tools and powers);
3. Re-offending.

There is a cross cutting theme of alcohol and drugs across all three priorities.

Funding for implementing the multi-agency delivery plan comes from the Police and Crime Commissioner via an annual bidding process. Housing associations are involved in this work.

Social Inclusion Statement

The 'Stratford-on-Avon District Social Inclusion Statement 2014' aims to reduce social exclusion including improving financial inclusion. The partners involved in this work are the District Council's housing service; Orbit Heart of England (the housing association with the most homes in this District); Stratford Citizens Advice Bureau; Stratford Town Trust; Voluntary Action Stratford-on-Avon District; Warwickshire County Council; Warwickshire Race Equality Partnership and Warwickshire Rural Community Council.

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The work of the partnership is informed by a research report it commissioned entitled '*Measuring Social Exclusion in Stratford-on-Avon District*' (Warwickshire Observatory, 2013). The research looked at seven aspects of social exclusion: isolation; cohesion; health and wellbeing; employment education and training (EET); income and debt; housing condition and housing need. The resulting actions focus both on specific geographical areas and on issues affecting the whole of the District.

Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership

The Government set up Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to stimulate economic growth and create jobs. The LEPs are led by the private sector but also involve the public sector. Funding comes from a variety of sources. There is funding to provide skills training and apprenticeships.

The objectives of the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP) are to

- Drive economic growth;
- Help remove barriers to economic growth;
- Help create high value jobs;
- Co-ordinate local government co-operation and support.

The CWLEP Strategic Economic Plan 2014 makes the link between economic prosperity, transport links and new housing. One of the identified growth challenges is '*availability of housing and affordable housing to meet current and future employment demand*'.

Warwickshire Sustainable Community Strategy

People, Places & Prosperity - a Sustainable Community Strategy for Warwickshire 2009-2026 details the long term vision for the County. The Strategy has nine outcomes, one of which is '*Our housing is appropriate and affordable*'.

Safeguarding vulnerable adults and children

Housing representatives feed into the work of the two Warwickshire County Council led partnerships that are concerned with keeping vulnerable adults and children respectively, safe.

Armed Forces Community Covenant

The District Council is signed up to the Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull Community Covenant, which provides help and services to current and

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former armed forces personnel and their families. There is specific legislation and guidance covering the housing of ex-service personnel.

Interface between housing, health, care and support

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 seeks to improve the quality of care, patient outcomes, efficiency, and to reduce inequalities of access and outcomes. The Act requires the NHS and local government to cooperate. This may be facilitated through Health and Wellbeing Boards (partnerships to advance the health and wellbeing of people in an area).

The Care Act 2014 also aims to improve people's quality of life. It requires joint working across health and local authorities, including public health, social care and housing. The Act emphasises the role of services such as housing or employment in tackling the wider determinants of health.

The statutory guidance looks to housing services to help prevent or delay demand for intensive care and support. The 2014 Act embeds the concept of suitable living accommodation within the care and support system. Accommodation is included in the definition of wellbeing, and 'independent living' is confirmed as a 'core part of the wellbeing principle'. Local authorities must consider housing related outcomes alongside health and social care outcomes. (Foundations, January 2015).

Part of this joint working is the use of integrated budgets across health, care and support, and housing to support new and better services. This includes the Better Care Fund held by the County to fund disability adaptations to people's homes. Previously, each district and borough council received its own Disabled Facilities Grant funding for adaptations. Although funding is now pooled, district and borough councils retain a statutory responsibility for adaptations.

It can be difficult to get different organisations to recognize the link between poor housing and poor health and what to do about it. This issue has been picked up by the national [Memorandum of Understanding to support joint action on improving health through the home](#) (December 2014). This agreement has been signed up to by a wide range of agencies and sets out a shared commitment to joint action across government, health, social care and housing. The agreement has five aims:

- Establish and support national and local dialogue, information exchange and decision-making across government, health, social care and housing.
- Co-ordinate health, social care and housing policy.
- Enable improved collaboration and integration of healthcare and housing in delivery of homes.
- Promote the housing sector contribution to addressing the wider determinants of health.

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- Develop the workforce across sectors so staff are confident and skilled in understanding the relationship between where people live and their health and wellbeing.

In March 2015, NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) published a "guideline" to reduce the risk of death and ill health associated with living in a cold home. It makes the point that people living in cold homes experience health problems during 'normal' winter temperatures, and not just during extremely cold weather. The guideline aims to reduce excess winter death rates, improve the health and wellbeing of vulnerable people, reduce fuel poverty and improve the temperature in homes by improving energy efficiency.

Living with dementia

The District Council is working towards becoming a '*Dementia Friendly*' organisation. Training is provided for all frontline staff who may come into contact with people living with dementia and their carers.

Across the District information about living with dementia and the support that is available to both people with the condition and their friends and families is available via a wide range of organisations including Senior Citizens Advice Network (SCAN) meetings, dementia cafes, CAB and Voluntary Action Stratford-on-Avon (VASA), housing support providers and housing associations. The Coventry and Warwickshire Dementia portal provides additional information. Warwickshire's Living Well with Dementia Strategy is being refreshed in 2015.

Some housing associations have well developed policies and practice e.g. Orbit has trained its staff to help identify people who may be exhibiting early signs of dementia and what staff should do in such circumstances.

The Housing Strategy action plan includes some specific housing related actions around dementia.

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Aim 1

To support communities including increasing the supply and choice of good quality affordable housing for local people.

Delivering the strategy

Strategies are pointless unless they result in change. The Council will monitor and review progress against each of the actions in this Strategy. If required, actions will be updated to ensure that the Strategy continues to meet local communities' expectations.

Partners will monitor delivery of the Strategy via two large multi-agency groups. These are the Housing Partnership Meeting that is concerned with building new homes and the District Housing Forum, which aims to prevent homelessness.

Research about local housing and economic circumstances is required to deliver actions in the Strategy. The research will enable us to achieve value for money by correctly identifying problems and solutions.

The research will include keeping up to date with new policy initiatives; using existing research and undertaking new research to assess the scale and impact of particular housing issues; and consultation and feedback from customers, partners and residents. Housing frontline services regularly ask customers what they think about existing services and use this information to shape services. They also undertake regular diversity audits to ensure that they meet the needs of all people.

It is important that the right market and affordable housing, including housing for people with special needs, is provided across the District. To make this happen, housing organisations must continue to contribute to the drafting of the Local Plan and accompanying documents.

Actions

1. Monitor the success and impact of the Housing Strategy.
2. Maintain an up to date understanding of local housing circumstances to support the delivery of this Housing Strategy.
3. Ensure Local Plan (including the Core Strategy) provides the appropriate level, type, distribution and specification of market and affordable housing across the District to help achieve balanced housing markets.

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Enabling more and better affordable homes

Affordable housing is subsidised rented or intermediate housing for people who cannot afford and/or find suitable market housing. Intermediate affordable housing is housing at prices and rents above those of social rent but below market prices or rents. All affordable homes must be retained in perpetuity for future households or any subsidy recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. For a full definition of affordable housing, see the National Planning Policy Framework.

New affordable housing is a long-standing strategic priority for the District Council. Members receive regular progress reports on the delivery of affordable housing that also highlight future risks and opportunities.

Just over 1,100 new affordable homes were provided in the ten years to March 2014. The Council helped fund 138 of these homes through its own Affordable Housing Investment Programme. Without this funding, the homes would not have been built. Approximately 650 affordable homes will be built in the three years April 2014 to March 2017.

All affordable housing schemes are evaluated about a year after completion to record feedback from tenants and purchasers and the wider community, and development outcomes.

Sufficient and appropriate affordable housing allows for mixed income and all-age neighbourhoods and villages where young people, singles and families, including people with special needs and retired people can ensure local vitality. Good quality affordable housing promotes social cohesion; improves health and contributes to an attractive environment.

Creating sustainable communities is about making sure that new homes are of the right tenure, type, size and design to meet the needs of the local population including people who are disadvantaged or who require specialised forms of housing. New homes must also be environmentally sustainable and affordable to run. The ideal mix, type, size and tenure of affordable housing for each location will differ. Factors affecting the provision of affordable homes in each location include:

- Preferences of local people;
- Local household incomes;
- Planning policies;
- What need the homes are required to address i.e. who will live in them;
- The profile of any existing affordable homes (and new market housing) in the vicinity;
- The availability of funding which includes grant on some schemes;
- Local market conditions;
- Scheme viability;

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- The impact of other government policies such as welfare reform.

There is a need for all types and sizes of affordable homes to respond to the nature of local needs. Consultation on this Strategy demonstrated the popularity of 2-bed bungalows.

The affordable homes planned for any new settlement will be both an opportunity and a challenge. The homes are an opportunity because they will provide some much needed affordable housing and a challenge because we need to decide what households need what housing and how they can get it.

It is probable that a commuted sum will be paid in lieu of some of the affordable homes in any new settlement. The Council will need to determine how to spend this and other commuted sums. To date most sums have been spent on rural schemes but in the future, some sums may be spent in Stratford town where the need for affordable housing is greatest.

Shared ownership is expensive but the cost per month compares favourably with private rented in this District. To ensure we are building the right affordable homes, we need to review the affordability of some housing, including shared ownership and Affordable Rents. We need to do this in the context of other affordable and market housing options. We must also look again at the type and size of affordable homes we are building because of welfare reform and other policy changes.

Since 2003, the Council has funded an independent full-time Rural Housing Enabler to facilitate the development of rural housing schemes. The Rural Housing Enabler works with local communities to help them carry out housing needs surveys and identify suitable sites for development. We need to check that we are making best use of the Rural Housing Enabler post.

Parish council events are used to promote rural housing to meet local needs. Parishes that have successfully completed rural schemes sell the idea to other parish councils.

The Council is working with its partner housing associations, the Homes and Communities Agency, and the Rural Housing Enabler to establish and deliver an ongoing rural development programme. To this end, the Council has recently committed almost £800,000 (commuted sums and other funding) to help build 25 affordable homes in three villages.

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Actions

4. Seek to deliver the optimum amount and type of affordable homes on relevant development sites.
5. Continue to build the right affordable homes and ensure that they are available to all households who cannot afford or access suitable market housing.
6. Make best use of commuted sums to deliver affordable homes.
7. Continue to encourage and enable rural communities to meet their local housing needs.
8. Establish and deliver an on-going rural development programme.

Specialised housing, care and support

Some vulnerable people require housing related support to live independently in the community. Warwickshire County Council is considering how best to halve its funding for support (from £8.6m to £4.6m by 2017/18). We will not know until July 2015 how services will be reconfigured. If existing provision and what is in the pipeline is taken into account, single people and young people are the two groups of vulnerable people in this District with the most urgent *unmet* accommodation and support needs (see also Aim 3).

'Extra care' homes are fully self-contained specially designed homes with support and 24-hour care available to enable people to care for themselves and live independently. Each household has its own front door.

Extra care housing is a good solution for people whose disabilities, frailty or health needs make ordinary housing unsuitable but who do not need or want to move to long term care (residential or nursing homes).

Briar Croft, Stratford-upon-Avon, was the first Extra Care scheme in Warwickshire. An Extra Care scheme in Southam will open in summer 2015. The District Council and Warwickshire County Council are working together, and with housing associations, to deliver additional Extra Care Schemes for older people including people with dementia and or mental health difficulties.

There are a number of special needs schemes in the District for people under pensionable age. The latest are two flagship schemes for people with learning disabilities, one in Bidford and one in Shipston, which opened in 2014. Both schemes have been highlighted as national best practice. However, we need more housing for local people with physical

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disabilities, sensory impairment, and or mental health difficulties and or learning disabilities.

New Gypsy and Traveller sites will only be sustainable if they are well managed and have good facilities. As further authorised sites are developed in the District, it will be essential to ensure that minimum standards for management and facilities are in place.

Actions

9. Facilitate a reconfigured range of housing related support services.
10. Promote the development of further specialized housing with care schemes including housing with care suitable for adults with dementia and or mental health difficulties to widen housing and care options for older people.
11. Promote the development of specialised housing with care for adults with physical disabilities and sensory impairment, and or mental health difficulties and or learning disabilities.
12. Ensure all authorised Gypsy and Traveller caravan sites are well run by promoting good management and appropriate facilities.

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Aim 2

To improve existing housing and help people live as independently as possible.

Warm homes, adaptations and repairs

There were 55,300 dwellings in the District as at April 2013. Councils are legally required to keep housing conditions within their areas under review.

Most people want to live as independently for as long as possible in their current home. Maintaining and improving the physical fabric of housing provide good homes which are warm, safe and affordable to run, and that remain suitably as people's health needs change. These requirements are particularly important to people who are vulnerable: children, disabled people, those with chronic health conditions, and older people.

Nearly all, if not all, affordable homes meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard. A decent home is defined as free of serious hazards, warm, in a reasonable state of repair, and as having reasonably modern facilities. Some housing association homes are being retrofitted to make them warmer and reduce residents' fuel bills.

Cold and damp homes threaten good health, reduce quality of life and result in an increased number of deaths during the winter months. The highest concentration of fuel poverty is in the private sector (both owner occupied and private rented housing).

Fuel poverty occurs when households have above average fuel costs (the national median level) and if they spend that amount, they are left with a residual income below the official poverty line. About 12% of households in the District (6,300 households) are in fuel poverty.

These households are more likely to be people living alone; households on low incomes; and to live in homes with poor energy efficiency. People who are at home during the day (through, for example, unemployment or retirement, long-term sickness or disability) have a greater requirement for heat and hot water.

Improving residential energy efficiency is particularly important in tackling fuel poverty. Eliminating fuel poverty is the overall objective of *South Warwickshire's Affordable Warmth Strategy*.

Housing adaptations enable disabled people and people with mobility impairments to continue to live independently in their own homes. Adaptations restore privacy, confidence and dignity to individuals and

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their families, and significantly improve people's health and quality of life. They can ease the burden on carers.

The South Housing Assessment Team is responsible for carrying out adaptations in Stratford and Warwick Districts. The budget for Disabled Facilities Grants (commonly known as DFGs) is currently £400,000 per year. As from April 2015 Disabled Facilities Grants have been subsumed into the county level Better Care Fund.

The Government views Home Improvement Agency (HIA) services as the "hub around which vulnerable people are provided with personal support to make informed choices about their housing options and home environment". Warwickshire local authorities are exploring whether to create a single countywide HIA to deliver economies of scale and a more comprehensive and responsive service.

There is an additional annual budget of £150,000 for *Discretionary Grants* to pay for remedial works to properties. Typical jobs are roof repairs and improvements to heating.

In the three years 2011/12 to 2013/14, about 190 private homes, including some empty homes that were brought back into use, were improved with the aid of grants.

'Assistive Technology' (or AT) is any device which assists a person in retaining or improving their independence, safety, security and dignity (Housing LIN). People with disabilities, older people and people with dementia can benefit from AT. One well-known type of AT is telecare, which uses digital systems to monitor emergencies and lifestyle changes. It includes alarms, lifestyle monitoring and telehealth monitoring of vital signs, and covers a wide range of equipment (detectors, monitors, alarms, pendants etc.) and services (monitoring, call centres and response).

Actions

13. Support a programme to help people stay warm in their homes.
14. Participate in effective programmes of assistance to keep people in their own homes.

Raising standards and dealing with empty homes

Councils use the Housing Health and Safety Rating System to assess whether homes provide a safe and healthy environment for any potential occupier or visitor. The most serious hazards (Category 1) in the District are strongly associated with older dwellings, and dwellings occupied by older people, people with disabilities, people on low incomes and those in receipt of benefit.

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The main hazard failures in the District are excess cold, and falls on level surfaces and stairs. Private rented properties are more likely to have Category 1 hazards than owner occupied properties.

Stratford and Warwick District Council facilitate a joint Landlords Forum for private sector landlords and local letting agencies that focuses on improving standards, sharing good practice, and promoting the Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme. The Forum is chaired by landlords.

There were fourteen larger houses in multiple occupation in the District in November 2014.

The Council's Private Sector Housing Team wants proactively to target inspections for the worst properties.

Empty homes are a waste of a valuable resource. There are currently about 500 homes in the District that have been empty for more than six months. These homes are not necessarily always the same properties i.e. some come back into use but others fall into disuse. This is because even empty homes sell for a good price in this District.

In the past, the Council has given grants to owners to bring empty homes back into use in return for being able to nominate tenants to the properties and the properties being let at sub-market rents. Although, this funding is now drying up, the Council will continue to work with owners to bring empty homes back into use.

Actions

15. Work with partners to improve standards of accommodation across the District.
16. Deliver a programme of interventions to bring empty homes back into use.

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Aim 3

To prevent homelessness and reduce the harm caused by it.

Choice based lettings and tackling homelessness

The Council's Housing Advice Team runs a Housing Waiting List ('Home Choice Plus') for all housing association properties in the District and for some affordable homes outside the District. The Team is also responsible for advice on housing options and for dealing with homelessness. Customer satisfaction with the Team is high.

Demand for affordable homes in the District is high. There are over 4,500 households (10,000 people) on the List. Around 600 to 700 affordable homes become available for letting each year. The number of lets depends on how many new affordable homes are built and on how many existing housing association tenants move to other housing association properties.

Home Choice Plus is a choice based lettings scheme for affordable homes. It operates across Stratford-on-Avon District and most of Worcestershire. The scheme helps people to make informed choices about their housing options by allowing them to check the number and types of properties that become available for letting, and compare their priority for housing with that of other people. People 'bid' for affordable homes via the internet, and by telephone, text or in person at any of the Council's offices. The Council provides assistance to make it easier for vulnerable and older people to bid.

Families with children account for more than a third of all households on the List. Single people under pensionable age account for about a quarter of households; older people account for another quarter. Couples without children are the smallest group of households on the List. This is probably because of all the household types they find it easiest to find alternative accommodation that is suitable and affordable. Many households of working age on the Housing Waiting List are in full time or part time employment.

The most common tenure of households on the Housing Waiting List is private rented accommodation (including lodgers).

The Home Choice Plus policy on who is able to go on the List and what type of housing they can bid for has been reviewed in light of the Localism Act 2011. The latest policy changes will go live in summer 2015.

Homelessness occurs if a household has no accommodation that it can lawfully occupy or if it has accommodation but it would be unreasonable

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for the household to continue to occupy it. Homelessness can happen to anyone.

The Council has a legal duty to provide advice and assistance to all households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within the next 28 days. Only some households 'accepted as homeless' and 'owed the full homelessness duty' are entitled to longer term settled accommodation i.e. a housing association or private rented tenancy.

In 2013/14, the Council accepted 86 households as homeless and prevented 309 households from becoming homeless. Homeless applications and acceptances fluctuate over the years. For the past four years, the end of private tenancies was the main reason for people losing their accommodation and becoming homeless. Violent relationship breakdown was the next biggest cause of homelessness.

Homelessness is for the people directly affected stressful and unpleasant, and sometimes traumatic and dangerous. Its prevention thus contributes to better mental and physical health, and to keeping people safe. Preventing and responding to homelessness can assist independence and help people take a realistic approach to their housing. Prevention programmes are thus an efficient and effective use of public resources.

Over recent years, the Council has increasingly focused resources on preventing homelessness rather than just responding to it when it occurs. Effective homelessness prevention relies on the Council, at an early stage, advising people in housing difficulties or those who are at risk of losing their homes about their housing options. Prevention also depends on good partnership working, and on organisations sharing information about the local housing market and economy, and maintaining their knowledge of each other's respective services.

There is a range of services to assist people in housing difficulty including welfare advice and financial inclusion measures. The District Housing Forum co-ordinates much of the cross-agency work around homelessness. To engage with more hard to reach groups and vulnerable people, Bromford's Link project provides a drop in centre with advice, food and activities (See **Single people and young people in housing difficulty below** for details of other outreach services.)

The Council's **tenancy strategy** outlines who should get what housing association tenancy, and for how long, and what happens when a tenancy ends.

The tenancy strategy is a legal requirement under the Localism Act 2011. However, it has limited weight because housing associations are only required to have due regard to it or in other words to have considered it. Most housing associations work across a number of local authority areas and each area has its own tenancy strategy. It is difficult for associations to take proper account of all these different tenancy strategies. Each association has adopted its own group-wide tenancy policy.

Vision: A District of sustainable communities offering more people the opportunity to live independently in good quality housing of their choice.

Some housing associations are offering five year fixed term tenancies and some offer lifetime tenancies. In the next few years, the first five-year tenancies are due to end and be reviewed. In accordance with the tenancy strategy, associations will work with the Council to ensure this happens in a timely and ordered manner. It is anticipated that the vast majority of tenancies will be renewed because tenants will be unable to afford market accommodation.

The Council, in consultation with partners, is legally required to review the tenancy strategy. Before this happens, monitoring information about tenancies must improve.

Arrangements need to be put in place to ensure that people who are discharged from hospital are not homeless or do not have to return to unsuitable accommodation.

The Council is always looking to improve its homelessness service by completing a Government 'Gold Standard' peer review of its service.

The Council uses 22 housing association properties, and occasionally some bed and breakfast, as temporary accommodation for homeless households. The Council intends to review this accommodation and its management.

Paying housing benefit promptly helps households keep their accommodation and prevents homelessness.

Actions

17. Maintain commitment to the Home Choice Plus (housing waiting list) partnership and keep the operation and impact of the Allocations Policy under review to identify any necessary improvements.
18. Continue to deliver a successful housing options service to prevent homelessness for all types of households.
19. Ensure that the temporary accommodation and service for homeless households provides value for money, and is suitable and of good quality.
20. Maintain good performance for dealing with housing benefit claims (until full rollout of Universal Credit) and applications for Discretionary Housing Payments.

Vision: A District of sustainable communities offering more people the opportunity to live independently in good quality housing of their choice.

Supporting single people and young people

A multi-agency monitoring exercise undertaken by the District Housing Forum in March 2014 found 104 single people with housing difficulties. Half of the people considered they were homeless. However, two thirds of young people aged 16 to 24 years thought they were homeless. Twelve people including two 17 year olds slept rough at different times during the month. Being unable to afford accommodation and not managing financially were the main causes of people's housing difficulties. The most common support needs were housing support (usually to find accommodation), budgeting and benefits, and mental ill health. The latter is a significant new problem.

The Council and agencies estimated that nine people were sleeping rough on the night of 6 November 2014.

The Council is committed to the Government's No Second Night Out programme. However, there is no emergency access accommodation in the District. Coventry Cyrenians and Stonham provide some supported accommodation for single people but it is not emergency access. Coventry Cyrenians and Midland Heart do outreach work on the streets. These outreach arrangements will end shortly; a new service is urgently required.

In the current economic climate, it is difficult to secure capital and revenue funding for emergency access accommodation. Therefore, the Council will introduce a pilot 'housing first' programme. Housing first will provide people with ordinary accommodation and intensive support.

'Crisis homelessness' can occur when a young person is forced, or chooses, to leave the family home in a hurry. The young person may have made no plans in respect of their accommodation, income or personal safety. It is not always possible or safe for the young person to stay at, or to return, to the family home.

The Council is looking to provide emergency 'crash pad' accommodation for homeless young people i.e. the use of a room in someone's house for a short time. The room would give young people somewhere safe to go to and give them breathing space to work out what to do next.

There is a countywide protocol for dealing with homeless young people. It sets out the responsibilities of local housing authorities and Warwickshire County Council. There is considerable scope for better working to ensure that each young person in housing difficulty is provided with the support, and possibly accommodation, that they require.

Vision: A District of sustainable communities offering more people the opportunity to live independently in good quality housing of their choice.

Actions

21. Improve accommodation and support options (including emergency access provision) for single homeless people and people who sleep rough.
22. Improve emergency access and longer-term accommodation and support for homeless young people including vulnerable 16 or 17 year olds and care leavers aged 16-24 years.

Promoting shared ownership

Shared ownership may be expensive but it is a good option for people who cannot afford market housing. Surprisingly, few people appear to have heard of it. For example, some private rented research revealed that many estate agents knew nothing about it and thought that the Council only dealt with people on housing benefit. Checking whether shared ownership is affordable is one task. However, we also need to let people know about shared ownership in order to better assess demand for this tenure.

Action

23. Promote shared ownership to make more people aware of it as a housing option.

Housing Strategy April 2015 – March 2020 Action Plan

Vision: A District of sustainable communities offering more people the opportunity to live in good quality housing of their choice.



Corporate Strategy
South Warwickshire Community Safety Partnership Plan

Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Core Strategy
Social Inclusion Statement



Aim 1

To support communities including increasing the supply and choice of good quality affordable homes for local people.

- ◆ Delivery of Housing Strategy.
- ◆ Housing research
- ◆ Informing the Local Plan.
- ◆ New affordable homes including homes for older people, people with dementia, mental health difficulties, sensory impairment, and learning disabilities
- ◆ Rural development
- ◆ Commuted sums
- ◆ Housing related support
- ◆ Management and facilities on Gypsy & Traveller sites

Aim 2

To improve existing housing and help people to live as independently as possible.

- ◆ Warm homes
- ◆ Fuel poverty
- ◆ Adaptations for people with disabilities
- ◆ Serious disrepair
- ◆ Assistive technology / dementia
- ◆ Housing standards
- ◆ Educating tenants and landlords
- ◆ Enforcement action
- ◆ Houses in Multiple Occupation
- ◆ Proactive inspections
- ◆ Empty homes

Aim 3

To prevent homelessness and reduce the harm caused by it.

- ◆ Housing waiting list
- ◆ Housing options, preventing homelessness and review of homelessness service
- ◆ Tenancy Strategy
- ◆ Temporary accommodation
- ◆ Hospital discharge
- ◆ Housing benefit and Discretionary Housing Payments
- ◆ Single homeless people and rough sleeping
- ◆ Homeless young people
- ◆ Promoting shared ownership

Housing Strategy 2015 - 2021 Action Plan

Notes on reading the Action Plan

- SDC = Stratford-on-Avon District Council.
- The actions are strategic actions (that is, they are not detailed operational plans).
- The resources column has a list of main contributors (not necessarily headed by the 'lead' agency) but also includes key materials and some funding sources. The list relates to the action not the milestones / targets.
- **'Report'** means the production of a formal written report or information sheet to be considered by the appropriate committee or meeting or persons.
- **'Agree'** means agreement at the appropriate level (e.g. portfolio holder, committee or group), with a written record of the decision (e.g. minutes of a meeting making a clear reference to the document agreed).
- **'Review'** can mean anything from a focused discussion through to research and consultation leading to a formal report. The scale of the review should be appropriate to the action, but all reviews must have a recorded outcome (what considered, findings, recommendations or decisions, who involved, date) to allow for transparency, auditing and progress monitoring.
- **'Annual' or 'financial year'** refers to the period from the beginning of April to the end of March the following year.

Aim 1

To support communities including increasing the supply and choice of good quality affordable homes for local people.

Action		Resources	Milestones or targets	Progress
1.	Monitor the success and impact of the Housing Strategy.	SDC, District Housing Forum, Housing Partnership Meeting.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report (twice yearly) on the progress made against each action in this Strategy including risks to implementation. 2. Review the action plan (at least annually) to take account of changing circumstances. 3. Housing Partnership Meeting and District Housing Forum to each review annually the impact of the Housing Strategy. 	
2.	Maintain an up to date understanding of local housing circumstances to support the delivery of this Housing Strategy.	SDC, District Housing Forum Housing Partnership Meeting, external data & information sources.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review (by May 2016 and then annually) all research and other evidence required to enable the continual development of services, advice to customers and new homes. 	
3.	Ensure Local Plan (including the Core Strategy) provides the appropriate level, type, distribution and specification of market and affordable housing across the District to help achieve balanced housing markets.	<p>Housing market evidence.</p> <p>SDC, Housing Partnership Meeting, District Housing Forum.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Apply (through drafting of each document) the relevant learning from housing market assessments and other research. 	

Aim 1

To support communities including increasing the supply and choice of good quality affordable homes for local people.

Action		Resources	Milestones or targets	Progress
4.	Seek to deliver the optimum amount and type of affordable homes on relevant development sites.	<p>Planning policies and need analyses.</p> <p>SDC, partner housing associations, Homes and Communities Agency.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report (by September 2015 and then annually) on the number, tenure, type, size, and funding of affordable homes completed in the previous financial year; include feedback. 2. Report (twice a year) on the future delivery of affordable homes and any significant emerging issues. 3. Review and agree the affordable housing delivery plan (at least quarterly) with partner housing associations and the Homes and Communities Agency. 4. Provide training (by July 2016) for members. 	
5.	Continue to build the right affordable homes and ensure that they are available to all households who cannot afford or access suitable market housing.	SDC, partner housing associations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree (by May 2016) the affordable homes required on any new settlement and if appropriate on other sites, and how people can access them. 2. Review (by December 2016) the affordability of housing. 3. Review again (by April 2017) the type and size of affordable homes required in the light of welfare reform. 	
6.	Make best use of commuted sums to deliver affordable homes.	SDC, partner housing associations, Homes and Communities Agency.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review (by October 2016 and then annually) the use of commuted sums. 	

Aim 1

To support communities including increasing the supply and choice of good quality affordable homes for local people.

	Action	Resources	Milestones or targets	Progress
7.	Continue to encourage and enable rural communities to meet their local housing needs.	Planning policies and housing needs surveys. Rural Housing Enabler, SDC, parish councils, local communities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitate at least 10 community engagement programmes (local housing needs surveys and or site canvassing exercises) each year. 2. Report (by September 2015) and then annually on progress on rural housing enabling. 3. Provide training (by December 2015) for members and others about the role of the Rural Housing Enabler and the sustainability of new housing. 4. Review (by July 2016) the Rural Housing Enabling role to make best use of it. 5. Facilitate (by June 2017) a rural housing enabling event involving parish councils to promote rural housing. 	
8.	Establish and deliver an on-going rural development programme.	SDC's Affordable Housing Investment Programme, National Affordable Homes Programme and other funding. Housing associations, SDC, Homes and Communities Agency.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to deliver (in line with the Rural Housing Programme Grant Agreement) a rural affordable housing development programme. 2. Review progressing (by October 2017) a further rural housing development programme. 	

Aim 1

To support communities including increasing the supply and choice of good quality affordable homes for local people.

Action		Resources	Milestones or targets	Progress
9.	Facilitate a reconfigured range of housing related support services.	Countywide Housing Related Support Partnership Working Group, Warwickshire County Council, housing related support providers.	1. Jointly commission (by March 2018) a revised range of housing related support services.	
10.	Promote the development of further specialized housing with care schemes including housing with care suitable for adults with dementia and or mental health difficulties to widen housing and care options for older people.	SDC, Warwickshire County Council, Homes and Communities Agency, specialist development and management partners.	1. At least seven Extra Care schemes (by March 2020) incorporating a high proportion of affordable dwellings completed and or newly committed in the District. 2. Review (by March 2017) the above milestone.	
11.	Promote the development of specialised housing with care for adults with physical disabilities and sensory impairment, and or mental health difficulties and or learning disabilities.	SDC, Warwickshire County Council, Homes and Communities Agency, specialist development and management partners.	1. At least six specialised housing with care schemes (by March 2020) incorporating a high proportion of affordable dwellings completed and or newly committed in the District. 2. Review (by March 2017) the above milestone.	

Aim 1

To support communities including increasing the supply and choice of good quality affordable homes for local people.

	Action	Resources	Milestones or targets	Progress
12.	Ensure all authorised Gypsy and Traveller caravan sites are well run by promoting good management and appropriate facilities.	SDC, Gypsies and Travellers, Warwickshire County Council.	1. Adopt (in line with the Local Development Scheme timetable) a Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan that includes polices on management and facilities.	

Aim 2

To improve existing housing and help people live as independently as possible.

Action		Resources	Milestones or targets	Progress
13.	Support a programme to help people stay warm in their homes.	<p>Various sources of subsidies and grants to individuals, home works grants.</p> <p>SDC, Act on Energy, Warm and Well in Warwickshire Partnership.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report (by August 2015) on actions taken by the Council to combat excess heat and cold, and to address fuel poverty. 2. Evaluate (by January 2019) options to improve the situation of residents not on the main gas network. 3. Complete (by March 2020) at least one project that benefits residents in all tenures by working with partners and local communities. 	
14.	Participate in effective programmes of assistance to keep people in their own homes.	<p>Better Care / Disabled Facilities Grant funding, learning and funding from other sources.</p> <p>SDC, Warwick DC, South Home Improvement Agency, North Warwickshire Housing Adaptations Service, Warwickshire County Council, NHS, Age UK.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree (by May 2016) the best service design for delivering a streamlined adaptations service. 2. Evaluate (by December 2016) the best mechanism for delivering Discretionary Grants to help people keep their homes warm and free from serious disrepair. 3. Align (by January 2017) work on assistive technology with health and social care including supporting people with dementia. 	

Aim 2

To improve existing housing and help people live as independently as possible.

	Action	Resources	Milestones or targets	Progress
15.	Work with partners to improve standards of accommodation across the District.	Enforcement powers, Landlord Forum and training, National Landlords Association.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report (by June 2016 and then annually) on educational work with tenants on their rights and responsibilities, work with landlords to ensure they are fully informed of legal requirements and accreditation schemes; report on any enforcement action undertaken. 2. Identify (by December 2017) licensable and non-licensable houses in multiple occupation. 3. Identify (by April 2018) priorities for proactive inspections. 4. Use (by April 2019) proactive inspections to improve housing standards. 	
16.	Deliver a programme of interventions to bring empty homes back into use.	SDC, Empty Dwelling Management Orders.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify (by April 2016 and then annually) all empty properties and highlight empty property hotspots. 2. Bring (by March 2019) 100 empty properties back into use by providing encouragement, support and information. 	

Aim 3: To prevent homelessness and reduce the harm caused by it.

	Action	Resources	Milestones or targets	Progress
17.	Maintain commitment to the Home Choice Plus (housing waiting list) partnership and keep the operation and impact of the Allocations Policy under review to identify any necessary improvements.	SDC, Home Choice Plus Partnership, District Housing Forum.	1. Assess (by December 2016) the impact of recent changes to the Home Choice Plus Allocation Policy and determine if any further action is required.	
18.	Continue to deliver a successful housing options service to prevent homelessness <i>for all types of households</i> .	SDC, District Housing Forum, housing associations, NHS.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report (by December 2015 and then annually) on the success of homelessness prevention activities. 2. Review (by November 2016 and then biennially) the range of homelessness prevention activities and identify any necessary changes. 3. Review (by January 2017) the Tenancy Strategy. 4. Develop with health (by February 2017) a hospital discharge protocol to enable planned moves for people who may be homeless on discharge. 5. Complete (by June 2017) a Gold standard peer review of local homelessness services and agree any necessary changes. 	

Aim 3: To prevent homelessness and reduce the harm caused by it.

	Action	Resources	Milestones or targets	Progress
19.	Ensure that the temporary accommodation and service for homeless households provides value for money, and is suitable and of good quality.	SDC, Christian Alliance Housing Association (Chapter 1) and other housing associations and partners.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure (by October 2015) that the management of temporary accommodation is appropriately resourced. 2. Determine (by February 2017) a preferred model for future delivery and management of temporary accommodation. 3. Implement (by February 2018) the preferred model of temporary accommodation. 	
20.	Maintain good performance for dealing with housing benefit claims (until full rollout of Universal Credit) and applications for Discretionary Housing Payments.	SDC, housing associations, private landlords.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meet annual performance targets for time taken to process new claims for housing benefit and changes to claims 2015-2016 target is 17 days. 2. Spend at least 80% of the Discretionary Housing Payment budget each financial year. 	
21.	Improve accommodation and support options (including emergency access provision) for single homeless people and people who sleep rough.	SDC, providers, District Housing Forum, Warwickshire County Council, Housing First.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree (by September 2015) a new outreach service for people who sleep rough. 2. Introduce (by October 2015) a pilot Housing First programme to help people into accommodation. 3. Agree (by April 2016) a protocol for assisting people who sleep rough in line with the principles of a "no second night out" approach. 	

Aim 3: To prevent homelessness and reduce the harm caused by it.

Action	Resources	Milestones or targets	Progress	
22.	Improve emergency access and longer-term accommodation and support for homeless young people including vulnerable 16 or 17 year olds and care leavers aged 16-24 years.	Doorway, Warwickshire County Council People group, Orbit Heart of England Housing Association, potential providers, SDC, District Housing Forum.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deliver (by June 2016) crash pad accommodation for young people. 2. Review (by July 2017) the Warwickshire Protocol for Assessing and Managing the Housing Needs of Homeless Young People Homeless Protocol. 3. Review (by January 2018) the effectiveness of work for young people and agree a way forward. 	
23.	Promote shared ownership to make more people aware of it as a housing option.	SDC, housing associations, District Housing Forum, local employers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree and implement (by May 2018) an action plan with partners to raise awareness of shared ownership. 	