

4 FEBRUARY 2020

Draft Walsall Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Cllr Andrew - Regeneration

1. Aim

The Council is updating its Housing Strategy (the “Strategy”) to set out its housing vision and objectives. The Strategy (Appendix 1) details our housing priorities for the next 5 years and how we intend to achieve them. Partnership working is particularly important in the delivery of this Strategy as the council has no housing stock. It provides links to the Council’s and partners’ key strategic documents such as the Walsall Plan and Walsall for All strategy, and is shaped in the context of the work across the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). The Strategy has been developed to shape the future housing market in support of economic growth.

2. Recommendations

That committee provide feedback on the Draft Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025.

3. Report detail – know

3.1 The Council’s last Housing Strategy covered the period 2011 to 2016, and has required updating for some time. There is no statutory requirement to have a Housing Strategy, but it is regarded as best practice and nearly all, if not all, local authorities have one. The Strategy sets out the council’s strategic housing approach, linking in with key partners.

3.2 The Strategy’s vision has been adopted from the Corporate Plan to provide a consistent message for residents, and covers the same time period as the next version of the Corporate Plan. The six objectives were developed with Walsall Housing Partnership, which includes all the key Housing Associations (HAs) operating in the borough, and consist of:

- **Increase housing supply and choice for our residents**

Priorities include the Walsall to Wolverhampton corridor which forms part of the WMCA housing deal secured with government, and will deliver 8,500 new homes across the corridor. We will work with housing providers to try and secure apprentice opportunities, and use of local businesses for labour and or supply of building materials. We will encourage high quality design, street scene and tenure mix, providing homes for all income levels including affordable and higher income home ownership.

- **Improve the energy efficiency of existing and new homes**

We will strive to ensure that everyone has the option to live in an energy efficient home which is well insulated and affordable to heat, cool and use. We will continue to work with our partners, including Accord and whg, to maintain our position as an excellence hub for advanced manufacturing in construction (AMC). We will aspire to new homes that are more energy efficient, and will continue to work with partners and bid for funding to make our existing homes more energy efficient and affordable to run.

- **Making best use of private sector homes**

The Council needs to ensure that homes in the private rented sector (PRS) are safe to live in, and also maximise the use of empty homes by bringing them back into use wherever possible through advice, council tax premium powers, and where necessary the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs). We will work proactively with landlords, but also continue enforcement work to eradicate trip and fall hazards in the home, and tackle rogue landlords.

- **Integrated Communities – Walsall for All**

The council is committed to promoting community cohesion, social inclusion and values cultural diversity. We will help build resilient and integrated communities, supporting the work of the Walsall for All partnership. We will consider all communities, including exploring options to address the needs for transit sites for gypsies and travellers. We will learn from our residents so that we can help new housing developments be more integrated within themselves, as well as with existing communities and estates.

- **Promote independent living, and health and wellbeing**

The Council want to enable Walsall residents to manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. The Council and partners have collectively formed the Walsall Together programme, to help build resilient communities with an offer of integrated prevention and early intervention for all Walsall residents. We will work with housing and care providers to develop flexible schemes that can cater for a variety of needs including older person extra care, and 'step down' facilities from hospital. We will continue to use assistive technology, and adapt homes, to help people live safely in their own home for as long as they can.

- **Prevent and reduce homelessness**

The Council is working closely with partners to prevent homelessness, and where this is not possible, we aim to relieve homelessness as efficiently as we can. We are making changes to services including piloting a new dispersed temporary accommodation service, so that there is more opportunity for a tailored service for families with children for example. We continue to build on our domestic violence support services, seeking extra funding for support officers. The Council's housing and children's services will continue to work closer together to ensure a single pathway for our young people in need of housing assistance. We intend to maintain our Outreach service to reduce the number of people having to sleep rough in Walsall, and continue to lead the region with our flagship Housing First service, providing rough sleepers with a home and as much support as needed.

Consultation

- 3.3 There has been a four week public consultation period which closes 31st January 2020, and specific stakeholder sessions. At the time of writing this report most of the consultation has taken place, but is not fully concluded. There have been a number of helpful issues raised which will be incorporated in the revised draft Strategy prior to submission to Cabinet, including:

- Consider reduced plastic technology in construction
- Create links to community safety and crime reduction, including hate crime
- Expansion of the resilient communities and place making aims, including:
 - community activity, involvement and communication,
 - encourage housing developers to engage with existing communities when proposing new developments,
 - partners' work with new residents through pre tenancy workshops and group tenancy sign ups,
 - increase tenant involvement, learning from Walsall's existing tenant management organisations and housing cooperatives
- Greater focus on poverty, particularly food and child poverty
- Make best use of all homes (not just private), including housing associations
- Reference modern slavery work and responsibilities
- Link to mental health, drug and alcohol services and initiatives
- Ensure a focus on home ownership opportunities and energy efficient homes
- More reference to the corporate parent, and that good housing improves children's life chances, and links through to educational attainment, and strengthens the quality of family relationships

Financial information

- 3.4. There are no specific financial implications directly associated with the Strategy. The priorities contained within the Strategy will be funded through existing budgets, existing grant income and future grant bids. It will also be supplemented by partners resources committed to their own activities that contribute to the achievement of the Strategy objectives. The adoption of the Strategy is likely to maximise the amount of housing related external funding the Council may achieve.

Reducing Inequalities

- 3.5 The Strategy has a focus on providing new homes for all our residents, whether they need affordable housing, good quality private rented, or aspire to home ownership. It notes the unaffordability of home ownership, with house prices at over 6 times income, and sets principles in place to help increase new home building across a range of different tenures. It considers how energy efficiency can be improved both in new and existing homes, and how Walsall communities can become more integrated, to help build resilient communities.
- 3.6. The Strategy considers the six policy objectives in the Marmot review (2010). It looks to create the conditions for good quality housing that will help our children have a good home, and help everyone to maximise their capabilities. The Strategy considers how new housing can be put in place in the right areas to support

employment. It looks to improve quality and energy efficiency of both new and existing housing to help ensure a healthy standard of living, and contribute towards ill health prevention. Sustainable places and communities is at the heart of our Vision, through building resilient and integrated communities.

4. Decide

4.1 Different options the committee could take forward include:

- Provide feedback as part of the consultation process
- Support the strategy to go forward to Cabinet

5. Respond

5.1 The Strategy could be amended to incorporate Scrutiny feedback prior to Cabinet, in consultation with the portfolio holder. Scrutiny feedback will be reported back to Cabinet when seeking approval of the Strategy.

6. Review

6.1 It is essential that the Strategy is delivered and monitored as a partnership. It will be monitored quarterly by the Council's Money Home Job service. It will also be scrutinised and reviewed on an annual basis by:

- Walsall Housing Partnership
- Walsall Homelessness Steering Group
- Walsall Private Landlord Steering Group

6.2 The key performance indicators that will be monitored on a quarterly basis as part of the overall Strategy monitoring include:

- 25% affordable housing on all applicable sites
- Keep EPC Bands F and G below 2.53% each year
- 250 households live in safer private rented accommodation by 2025
- 10% reduction in the number of long term (over 6 months) empty homes by 2025
- Actively increase the representation of BAME residents to 23% in our formal consultation processes
- Minimum 250 property adaptations per year
- Minimum 50% of successful prevention outcomes are through keeping people in the home by 2025
- Maximum 0.9 households in Temporary Accommodation per 1000 households.
- Reduction in number of people sleeping rough to 3 by 2025
- 88 people rehoused and supported in Housing First by April 2021

Background papers

None

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APPENDIX 1

CONSULTATION DRAFT Housing Strategy 2020 - 2025

Walsall Council

Foreword

It is my ambition that Walsall residents should be able to live in a decent home that meets their needs and aspirations. A good home is fundamental to feeling safe, secure and well, and provides a settled base to maximise learning and employment opportunities. Since our last Housing Strategy, we have ensured the delivery of a significant number of affordable homes, continued to prevent homelessness, and helped improve the energy efficiency of Walsall's homes.

To continue this good progress, we will take advantage of the new opportunities arising from our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority, taking the lead role on the Land and Housing agenda. We will continue to work with all our partners to:

- develop good quality new homes where people aspire to live
- make the best use of homes by improving conditions, bringing long term empty homes back into use, and helping communities to integrate
- make our homes energy efficient and cheaper to run so that residents are warm in winter
- minimise homelessness and poverty.

This Housing Strategy will help deliver the Walsall Plan priorities, and will support our other strategies such as our Walsall for All, Early Help, and Strategic Economic Plan.

Working together, we can make real progress to a decent home for all. I passionately believe we can make a difference to people's lives, and that all starts with getting our housing offer right.

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Implementation, Monitoring and Review

Context

This strategy aims to outline how the council will use its powers under planning and housing legislation to provide the new homes that our residents need and to improve the existing housing stock. As the council does not own any housing, we will make best use of our partnerships with the social housing sector as well as with private landowners and developers.

Walsall

Walsall is a metropolitan borough consisting of a mix of urban, suburban and semi-rural communities, and has a population of 281,300¹. The borough covers 40 square miles, is located to the north-west of Birmingham, and is one of the four local authorities that make up the Black Country sub-region (with Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton). Walsall is part of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), along with the rest of the Black Country, plus Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull.

Walsall town centre lies at the heart of the borough surrounded by Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston and Willenhall district centres. There are two distinct housing markets in Walsall. The west of the borough borders traditional Black Country manufacturing areas with the M6 a prominent feature. The east of the borough borders open countryside with affluent settled areas where there are extensive green spaces between neighbourhoods and much less industry.

In 2003, Walsall Council transferred its housing stock to two new organisations; walsall housing group (whg) and Walsall Association of Tenant Management Organisations (WATMOS). This followed on from a small scale stock transfer to Beechdale Housing Association (now part of Longhurst Group) in 1996. Together these housing associations (HAs) own 80% of the affordable housing in Walsall as per approximate numbers below:

- whg - 20,000
- Watmos - 1,700
- Longhurst Group (Beechdale) - 1,300

The other main provider of affordable homes in Walsall is Accord Group, with approximately 4,200 homes. A smaller number of affordable homes are provided by Bromford, Clarion, Midland Heart, Asra and Stonewater, with additional older person housing provided by Housing 21, Hanover and Nehemiah. The majority of these HAs come together with the council to form Walsall Housing Partnership (WHP).

The Walsall Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2019 has shown there has been a significant increase in the size of the private rented sector since Census 2011 from 11.7% to 16%, and subsequent decrease in owner occupation from 63% to 59%, and social housing has remained at around 25%. Average House prices in the borough between

¹ Office for National Statistics, mid-year estimates 2017

December 2018 and December 2019 are £166,532 and the mean annual gross pay for October 2019 is £24,014. This means the ratio of income to house prices is unaffordable for many, with average house prices being around 7 times of annual gross pay.

Policy and legislation

National housing policy and strategy has seen substantial changes in recent years. A programme of welfare reform changes in 2013 resulted in the introduction of:

- Spare bedroom subsidy (Bedroom Tax);
- £20,000 benefit cap for couples, families, and £13,400 for single adults.

The most recent legislation has been introduced through the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Whilst the Housing and Planning Act gained royal assent in 2016, a number of the Act's key provisions are yet to be implemented and others have been dropped. Some of the measures are in force such as strengthening action against rogue landlords, changes to neighbourhood and local planning, and bolstered compulsory purchase powers.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, implemented in April 2018, provides a greater focus on homelessness prevention, and new duties to help anyone regardless of priority need. It also extends the homelessness duty period to 56 days and includes a public body duty to refer which means some public authorities have to notify councils of service users they think may be homeless or threatened with becoming homeless.

The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy was launched in August 2018. The Government is committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027.

A social housing green paper was published in 2018 with a focus on decent homes, improving tenant complaints resolution, tackling stigma, strengthening regulation, and supporting community and home ownership. The council will monitor whether any of these proposed measures are implemented and will respond accordingly.

In December 2019, the Queen's Speech outlined a new focus on Renters Rights, Planning Reform, Home Ownership and Decarbonisation. The Government made a commitment to one million new homes over the Parliament term and will also offer key workers and local people discounts on new homes through a First Homes scheme. The introduction of a Renters Reform Bill will look to deliver a fairer, more effective, and professional rental market through greater affordability and security of tenure for tenants and accountability for landlords and lettings agents. The Government will also look to widen access to, and expand the scope of, the database of rogue landlords and property agents and introduce a Lifetime Deposit scheme.

Vision and Objectives

Vision

To ensure a consistent message for our residents, we have adopted the following priority from the Council's Corporate Plan 2018 to 2021 as our Vision:

'Communities are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.'

This Strategy can only be delivered with the help of our partners, and as such our Vision will also support:

- The Walsall Plan: Our Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019 to 2021
- the 'Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On' report due to be published in 2020.

Objectives

The Vision will be underpinned by the objectives developed by WHP:

- Increase housing supply and choice for our residents
- Improve the energy efficiency of existing and new homes
- Making best use of private sector homes
- Integrated Communities – Walsall for All
- Promote independent living, and health and wellbeing
- Prevent and reduce homelessness

Achievements

- 1300 affordable homes built in the last five years
- Successful multi tenure regeneration:
 - Goscote with 412 homes developed at Waterskeep, and another 407 homes about to start on site
 - 235 homes provided in Brownhills district centre
 - 233 homes completed at Harrowby Road, Moxley
 - 170 homes completed at the former Servis site, Darlaston
 - 207 homes under construction at Heathfield Lane West.
 - Major former industrial derelict sites brought forward for development – 263 homes to be developed at former Caparo, and 252 homes to be developed at former Goscote Copperworks
- 499 homeless preventions since the introduction of HRA (2017) in April 2018
- First area in the WMCA to deliver the Housing First service for rough sleepers, with 41 housed through the programme
- More than 2000 adaptations have been completed in last five years
- 125 Statutory housing notices served in last five years
- 750 energy measures delivered since July 2018
- Winners of the IRRV and Technical Officer of the Year awards in 2019
- 29% reduction in long term empty homes in last five years

1. Increase housing supply and choice for our residents

Delivering Housing Supply and Regeneration

The current housing requirement in Walsall to 2026 is set out in the Black Country Core Strategy (BCCS). However, the Government has introduced a standard method for calculating housing need and this indicates that there is now a need for 908 net new homes in Walsall per year. This need will be addressed through the Black Country Plan (BCP), which is in preparation and will replace the Core Strategy and cover the period to 2038. Over the last 5 years an average of 734 new homes have been developed in Walsall per year, and we need to consider how we will increase this build rate, whilst also ensuring that the right homes are built in the right locations, and to a high quality. Locations for new homes are shown in Walsall's Site Allocation Document (SAD), which was adopted in January 2019. Our housing requirement ambitions are supported by the principles of Walsall's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) around job creation through significant investment in road, rail and public transport infrastructure. As well as total new home numbers, the BCCS contains requirements for affordable housing. Preparation of the BCP will need to consider the future needs for affordable housing and other specialist types of accommodation such as housing for the elderly.

Our town and district centres are important to the well-being of the area. The Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) was adopted in January 2019 and identifies opportunities to provide more homes in appropriate locations. The Town Centre Masterplan provides a vision and interventions to stimulate investment and bring about transformational change in the town centre over the next 20 years. The masterplan vision is to ensure that 'Walsall will have the healthiest town centre in the country where people are proud to live and work within a healthy environment and balanced economy'. The vision includes encouraging a diverse range of uses, particularly high quality town centre living. Previous regeneration interventions have already delivered additional housing within Brownhills District Centre, as well as at Goscote and Moxley. The Council is considering options for a delivery plan for Willenhall Garden City.

The Walsall to Wolverhampton Growth Corridor has been identified as a priority regeneration area for the WMCA and forms part of the Housing Deal secured with Government. Sites in the corridor will potentially benefit from a £60m Land Fund available to acquire, remediate and de-risk housing land in order to accelerate delivery and increase the quality and density of new homes. There is an aim to deliver approximately 8,500 homes across the corridor by 2031, many of which will be within the Walsall administrative boundary. The corridor stretches from Walsall Town Centre to Wolverhampton City Centre, which incorporates the Town Centre and the surrounding area up to M6 Junction 10, Birchills, Leamore, and Willenhall. One of the key principles of the programme is to secure transformational place-making and attract and retain strong and sustainable communities through good design, high-quality street scene and tenure mix. There is also a focus on increasing the use of Advanced Manufacturing in Construction (AMC) housing. Finally, it is the intention to ensure that a significant amount of the new housing in this corridor provides affordable housing options.

A further benefit with maximising housing development is the employment and training opportunities that it can generate, as well as opportunities for the local supply chain. Walsall's Economic Team work closely with housing developers through the planning process to encourage and support the employment of construction apprentices, and use of local products and services. It is estimated every £1 spent on house building generates £2.84 in total economic activity and £1 million of building investment supports 12 year-long jobs².

We will:

- Engage with Walsall College to ensure appropriate courses and opportunities are available to Walsall residents wishing to progress a career in construction. This will include consideration of skills required for AMC
- Work with private developers and HAs through the pre application process to try and secure apprentice opportunities, and use of local businesses for labour and or supply of building materials
- Strive to provide a fully resourced, comprehensive and responsive planning service
- Work with private sector housing developers to encourage investment and development into key priority sites for residential development
- Encourage the provision of homes in and around our town and district centres that will meet the needs of all sections of our communities, including an element of aspirational homes
- Work with partners to consider where regeneration of existing estates is appropriate, through selective demolition, remodelling and reprovion
- Identify and implement the most appropriate mechanism for bringing forward regeneration in Willenhall
- Carry out an options appraisal on the merits of different housing delivery models including setting up a local housing company, or establishing joint ventures / legal partnerships with housing developers and or HAs
- Consider the use of compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers to bring long term vacant / strategically significant land back into use for housing
- Make best use of the council's existing land assets, including strategic packaging of sites where appropriate
- Work closely with the WMCA to make use of all available powers and funding to unlock housing development sites
- Encourage the use of AMC homes where appropriate
- Consider the use of garden city design principles on appropriate sites across the borough.
- Promote the WMCA regional design charter and explore the need for additional local design guidance
- Consider the impact of major development proposals on health and wellbeing of new and existing communities through a health impact assessment
- Ensure that health and safety of residents is paramount following the Grenfell fire tragedy

² Sources: Capital Economics and L.E.K. Consulting, Construction in the UK Economy: The Benefits of Investment (The UK Contractors Group, London), 2009.

Meeting Housing Need and providing Affordable Housing

Evidence published in 2017 to support the preparation of the BCP indicated that we require 179 affordable homes per year to 2036, with a mix of rented and home ownership options. There is a fairly even split of requirements by property size, but with the highest demand for 4 bed plus affordable rented homes.

Approximately 1,300 new affordable homes have been developed in Walsall over the last 5 years (2014 to 2019). New affordable homes in Walsall are predominantly affordable rent, although there is some limited provision of social rent through planning gain contributions, and we do encourage the choice of shared ownership and other affordable home ownership options where appropriate.

Affordable housing will continue to be delivered by our HA partners, either grant funded by external agencies such as Homes England, or through private housing developer contributions secured through legal agreements, known as S106 agreements, as part of the planning process. The type and tenure of our affordable housing contributions from developers is guided by Walsall's Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). We typically require developers to provide affordable housing on site, but in certain circumstances we can instead receive a financial contribution to provide affordable housing units elsewhere – this is known as a commuted sum.

We will:

- Continue to maximise housing developers' affordable housing contributions through the planning permission process, subject to financial viability of the development. **Target** - 25% affordable housing on all applicable sites
- Develop a commuted sum spend programme to work with partners to increase the affordable housing supply through the purchase of existing empty homes or the development of new homes
- Review and revise Walsall's Affordable Housing SPD during 2020/21 to update the type and tenure requirements, and address recent and emerging changes in national policy and legislation
- Continue to work closely with our major HA partners to ensure that a sufficient number of the right type of affordable housing is provided

2. Improve the energy efficiency of existing and new homes

Improve home energy efficiency

It is important to ensure that everyone has the option to live in an energy efficient home which is well insulated and affordable to heat, cool and use. The council has a published Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Action Plan that identifies our key actions. A number of Walsall's wards have above average levels of income deprivation, and so this increases the priority to ensure homes are affordable to live in. It is essential that we seek to improve energy efficiency in a number of ways, including both new and existing homes.

New Homes

The national Future Homes Standard will require new build homes to be future-proofed with low carbon heating and world-leading levels of energy efficiency, and it will be introduced by 2025. It is expected that this will provide primary energy and householder affordability metrics for new build housing.

The council will work with housing providers to improve the energy efficiency of new homes, both in the construction phase, and for the end users. In 2011, Walsall Council worked in partnership with Accord HA to help them deliver the country's first HA led AMC factory in Beechdale. This factory has produced around 200 closed panel timber frame homes per year since then, and has been so successful that Accord subsequently moved their operation to greatly expanded premises in Aldridge in 2017, capable of delivering 1000 new homes per year. The Beechdale factory is currently being retained by Accord for storage and potential future component manufacturing. Another success of the project has been Accord working with the council's economic team to help local unemployed people find sustainable employment within these factories.

In 2019, one of our other major partners, whg were successful in attracting £1m grant funding from Innovate UK to fund research and development in offsite housing construction. Whg intend to use AMC to contribute to their target of building 3000 new homes in the next 5 years, with the vast majority being provided in Walsall. Walsall Council's Planning Department have already granted permission for the temporary show home that whg are constructing by their head office. The Planning Department is also working with whg to ensure that suitable designs come forward to deliver much needed housing on derelict garage sites within whg's ownership.

The council will:

- Continue to work with these and other partners as we strive to consolidate Walsall's position as a regional excellence hub for AMC.
- Explore through the preparation of the BCP the possible need for additional planning guidance on energy efficiency standard requirements

Existing Homes

The council has an Ecoflex statement which will bring more resource into the borough through Eco3, up to March 2022, for energy efficiency works such as cavity and loft

insulation and the installation of new and more efficient heating systems. The council has been successful in a bid to the Warm Homes Fund for 200 fuel switches across the borough from inefficient electric heating to gas central heating (120 private and 80 Accord). The bids were submitted in partnership with Accord and E-ON. A further successful bid is enabling 112 free fuel switches (from oil and bottled gas) for park homes in the borough. These programmes will be delivered in 2020. The council will continue to seek such funds to help residents.

Many national energy suppliers are now rolling out smart meter schemes to help residents keep an eye on their energy costs. The Council is a Smart Energy GB in Communities partner with National Energy Action (NEA) charity and has trained champions to deliver information to residents on smart meters, particularly those in the over 65 age group.

The council has and will continue with partners to lead in tackling fuel poverty through:

- Action to reduce the percentage of dwellings with newly registered Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) that are in the lowest bandings of F and G (most energy inefficient). **Target** - to keep below 2.53% each year. We will encourage and where necessary enforce compliance with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (EPC must be E or above for private rented sector properties).
- Helping residents lower their fuel bills through:
 - Collective fuel switching
 - Advising on more efficient heating and more effective insulation
 - Education in use of heating and timers / thermostatic controls
 - Promoting renewable micro-energy production
- Helping residents improve their home insulation and heating through seeking grants / loans to help reduce the cost
- Helping residents reduce cost of appliance use through education and advice on efficient appliance types
- Working with the Local Energy Advice Partnership (LEAP) in offering free advice to help residents irrespective of tenure to save money and keep their homes warm
- Accessing Affordable Warmth funding through N-Power Foundations for Independent Living (FILT) to help fund boiler replacement for owner occupiers. The Council has also secured further FILT Gas Safe Charity Funding to fund interventions including repairs / servicing/ testing/ replacing gas appliances and infrastructure.

3. Making best use of private sector homes

The Council needs to ensure that homes in the private rented sector (PRS) are safe to live in. We also need to maximise the use of empty homes in the private sector by bringing them back into use wherever possible.

Private rented sector (PRS) standards

There is a mix of PRS stock in Walsall, with some good quality homes and responsible landlords, and some poor quality properties and landlords who do not maintain or manage their properties correctly and/or obtain the relevant licences.

The Council's Private Sector Stock Condition Survey (2019) identified that the PRS had risen to 16% of all homes in the borough. St Matthews has the highest proportion of PRS (30%). Palfrey and Pleck have significant levels of PRS but also have the highest levels of disrepair and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). Palfrey also has the highest level of category 1 hazards (under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, HHSRS), along with Paddock.

The Council will continue to work with landlords through our successful Landlord Forum and associated Steering Group and promote the benefits of landlords working collectively to improve the PRS offer in Walsall. We will also:

- Continue to carry out our inspection and advice function to eradicate Category 1 hazards (e.g. trip and fall hazards, excess cold) under the HHSRS
- **Target** - Help up to 250 households live in safer private rented accommodation by 2025, through serving statutory notices where applicable
- Strive to identify all licensable HMOs and ensure they are licensed
- Work with energy companies across all tenures to improve the energy efficiency of properties with a specific focus on tackling fuel poverty
- Encourage and where necessary enforce compliance with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard
- Tackle rogue landlords through enforcement action under legislation such as the Housing Act 2004 for breaches of legislation
- Continue our successful approach to bidding for external funding to enable intensive targeted action within particular areas and communities which experience high levels of poor quality PRS
- Seek to develop accreditation schemes for example for HMOs which recognise the high quality provided by a range of landlords.

Empty Homes

Empty homes can attract anti-social behaviour and the council is committed to protecting neighbouring residents. The council is working to see that these homes are brought back into use, to not only reduce the potential for this type of anti-social behaviour but also address housing need and support the borough's residential property market. Since 2011, the number of long-term empty homes (empty for longer than six months) has reduced by 42%.

The council offers advice and assistance to empty property homeowners to help bring them back into use to meet housing need. We will arrange for rubbish to be cleared where it is creating an eyesore or a health hazard where the owner fails to do so, and the owner will be recharged for this service. Where properties have been empty for significant periods of time and/or are in a bad state of repair, the Council will make repeated attempts to contact the owner and advise them how to bring the property back into use. If this approach fails, then the Council will consider the use of its CPO powers, and we have successfully completed two CPOs on much needed three bedroom homes.

The council also uses council tax premium powers as a deterrent to keeping properties empty. In January 2019, the council approved a motion to increase council tax premiums for long term empty homes. From April 2019, properties unoccupied and unfurnished for more than two years incur a 100% premium – double the normal council tax rate. From April 2020, council tax rates for properties unoccupied and unfurnished for more than five years will triple to 200%, and from April 2021 properties that are unoccupied and unfurnished for more than 10 years will be charged a 300% premium – four times the normal council tax rate.

The council will:

- Continue to monitor the number and location of long term empty dwellings. **Target** – 10% reduction in the number of long term (over six months) empty homes by 2025.
- Use CPO powers where advice and encouragement have not been successful in bringing an empty property back into use

4. Integrated Communities – Walsall for All

The council are committed to promoting community cohesion, social inclusion and value cultural diversity. We recognise that different communities have experienced different patterns of settlement and have varied lifestyles and economic circumstances, all of which have an impact on their need for housing and services.

Walsall is a culturally diverse borough with a 23.1% non-white British background, where people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi background form the largest Black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups. The number of non-UK born residents in Walsall increased by 3.7% (or 9,900 people) between the 2001 and 2011 censuses and Walsall now has a small Eastern European population who make up about 1% of residents (2,700 people in total). Census 2011 showed 288 people (0.1% of Walsall's population) identified themselves as gypsy or traveller. In terms of children and young people aged 0-17, the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups has increased to 37.4% of all pupils living in the area from 36.7% in 2016, and 24% of Primary pupils have English as an additional language. (School Census, January 2017).

In September 2015 the government confirmed that the UK would resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) by 2020. In July 2017 the nationality requirements were expanded to include individuals displaced by the conflict in Syria, but who may not necessarily have Syrian nationality. Walsall has housed 20 individuals through the national VPRS scheme.

In March 2018, the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced Walsall as one of five national pilot areas to develop and deliver a fully inclusive Integration Strategy. In January 2019, the council and partners launched their Strategy 'Walsall for All', which has the following four priority areas:

1. Connecting across communities
2. Young people learning and growing together
3. Working and contributing together
4. Living together

Whilst the housing agenda contributes to all these priorities, there is a particular housing focus on the 'Living together' priority. This specifically considers how the council is tackling rogue landlords, as new migrant communities may be disproportionately disadvantaged in poor rented properties. It also considers how the council can involve communities in planning and being involved in new housing developments.

Rogue Landlords

As well as supporting good landlords the council is committed to tackling rogue landlords. We undertake proactive work including the full use of all available legislation. The council has for example made use of:

- Statutory improvement notices;
- Prohibition orders – for the worst cases of poor housing condition;
- Civil penalties against landlords for failing to comply with legal notices. Legislation permits these being as high as £30,000 for each breach;

- Registration of a landlord on the national database of rogue landlords and letting agents

The council has been supported in 2019 by funding from the government to tackle rogue landlords and will continue to seek funding to expand this work.

Community involvement in planning new housing developments

Living together is about the creation and sustainment of residential areas, where people from different backgrounds can live together in harmony and across both new and existing estates. The council want to encourage major new developments to integrate with existing communities, regardless of tenure. We will work with partners to encourage community involvement in the planning design of new developments, using such techniques as 'Planning For Real'. Planning for Real, which is used by Accord, is a nationally recognised community involvement planning process based on 3-D modelling. We aim to use this type of modelling on the forthcoming development of the former Goscote Copperworks site, which will deliver approximately 250 mixed tenure homes. This site is close to recent new development by whg and Keepmoat, with hundreds of new homes built in and around the Goscote area following substantial demolition of pre existing estates. There is also a significant number of traditional established estates in the near vicinity.

We will:

- Use this as a pilot area to consider how these traditional and new estates, containing a variety of tenures and diverse communities, can form an integrated community
- Work with our housing providers to run learning workshops from large developments, with actual residents who are now living there to inspire future changes in planning, design, cohesion, transport links, for all new developments
- Work with our HA partners to ensure community cohesion and integration is considered when they allocate housing and when supporting their existing tenants
- Continue to support the integration of our Syrian refugee households that were rehoused in Walsall in 2017/18, through the Council's contracted provider the Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC) until 2023
- Work with MHCLG to support the governments new 2020 resettlement programme
- Explore options to address the needs for transit sites for gypsies and travellers
- Research the housing needs and aspirations of our existing BAME and new communities who are settling in the borough
- **Target** - Actively increase the representation of BAME residents to 23% in our formal consultation processes
- Conduct a service user satisfaction survey to measure the service users experience of the Council's Money Home Job function to help identify gaps in provision and to inform improvements.

5. Promote independent living, and health and wellbeing

The council want to enable Walsall residents to manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. A national driver called the Better Care Fund (BCF) has encouraged integration between health and social care systems across the country. The BCF has created the opportunity to pool health and social care budgets under an agreement to fund services in the community to help residents manage independence and remain at home for a longer period of time.

The council and its partners have come together to support independent living and wellbeing and have developed the local Walsall Together programme. Walsall Together is our local Integrated Care Partnership and includes partners across the borough; Walsall Council, Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust, Dudley & Walsall Mental Health NHS Trust, Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) One Walsall (Council for Voluntary Services) and local doctors (GPs). The partnership operates across the health and care system to deliver place-based integrated services to improve outcomes and quality of care for citizens of Walsall. One of the main work streams included in the Walsall Together programme is resilient communities. The partnership approach will help build resilient communities with an offer of integrated prevention and early intervention for all Walsall residents.

Walsall Together will deliver transformation for the following priority clinical pathways which are aligned to the local population and aims of improving independence and wellbeing:

- Respiratory
- Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)
- Diabetes
- Mental Health
- End of Life Care (EOL)

Walsall has a growing elderly population. It also has growing numbers of residents with additional needs, and a number of these individuals will be diagnosed with more than one additional need. Walsall's elderly (65+) population currently stands at 50,600 and is forecast to grow by a further 3,000 by the end of this Strategy. Walsall currently also has an estimated:

- 2,075 people with autism
- 5,015 adults with a learning disability
- 26,263 with a mental health disorder
- 3,646 with dementia

To help meet these needs Walsall will:

- Provide Housing and support services which offer tenancy and budgeting support with an emphasis on those with mental health problems or learning disabilities
- Work with providers to develop accommodation based services for Dementia
- Encourage Nursing Elderly Mentally Infirm (EMI) developments

- Encourage Extra Care developments, particularly in areas with little or no Extra Care service such as the Darlaston/Bentley and Pheasey/Paddock areas
- Work with providers to develop schemes that are as flexible as possible to cater for a number of these different needs and usages at the same location. This will enable better community integration and enable people to live as independently as possible, and to remain in their home for as long as practical.
- Include an element of 'step down' accommodation in these developments where appropriate, to help people transition from hospital to their own home.
- Align schemes funded by the Better Care Fund to the Walsall Together Alliance model to continue support across a number of social care services and resources.

The council will ensure homes are disability friendly wherever possible through a variety of options. We will continue to work in partnership to invest in a number of priorities highlighted across the Alliance such as assistive technology to help people live safely in their own home for as long as they can. We will ensure mobility and wheelchair adapted homes are available where possible through working with housing provider partners to offer wheelchair adapted homes as part of new developments, both a mix of family homes and ground floor flats and bungalows. Our partner whg provided five fully wheelchair adapted homes on its flagship Waterskeep development, and will provide a number of adapted houses and bungalows on its adjacent site which is due to be constructed in 2020 to 2023.

We will make best use of existing adapted homes, with whg keeping a list of those residents who have registered for adapted homes with them, and providing a home matching service where possible. We have an agreement with our HA partners that where they cannot match to one of their adapted properties, they will open this opportunity out to all the HAs in the borough to help one of their residents.

The council will continue to offer a property adaptations programme through our Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) service, which includes national award winning staff such as the 2019 Technical Officer of the Year. Last year we delivered 480 DFGs, which was significantly in excess of our target of 250, and we will continue to provide the best service possible. **Target** – minimum 250 property adaptations per year. This service provides adaptations for both children and adults who have adaptation requirements.

6. Preventing and reducing homelessness

In April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 came into force, bringing in new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness, specifically:

- Prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants, regardless of priority need
- An extension of the 'threatened with homelessness' period from 28 to 56 days
- Duty to refer - public services will need to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

The council prepared for this new duty by commissioning Neil Morland Consultants to update our Homelessness Strategy and Review. The Council has a legal duty to update our Homelessness Strategy every 5 years, and a significant range of HA, voluntary sector and other public service partners were involved in this process. We have continued this partnership momentum through:

- Working closely with partners to set up a duty to refer mechanism
- Setting up a quarterly multi agency Steering Group chaired by an independent voluntary sector partner. This built on our previous successful partnership which resulted in Walsall's innovative Housing First programme.
- Hosting a successful multi agency homelessness forum in 2019, which will now become an annual event
- Being a member of the WMCA Mayor's Homelessness Taskforce, including leading the 'families with children' work strand
- Providing training for all partners on the implications of the HRA Act and duty to refer, encompassing housing providers, probation, health, social care, voluntary sector

The Council also responded by reconfiguring our frontline homelessness services to enable us to have a greater focus on homelessness prevention. We were already in a positive position, having voluntarily operated a homelessness prevention service for some years.

The restructured frontline services, combined our homelessness, debt and welfare and crisis support services together to provide a single end to end service for our customers. We operate a triage service to ensure everyone who comes in to see us gets the right help at the right time, and we will continually review these arrangements to ensure they are fit for purpose. All our frontline staff have received training on the implications of the new Act. We will continue to maximise the use of our Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to prevent homelessness.

We have worked with our HA partners to streamline our Nominations process, (where HAs provide properties that we can match to our homeless households). We have worked with them to develop a revised Allocations Policy and Nominations Agreement, to ensure rehousing priority is given to those in the most need. In partnership with whg, we are trialling an Eviction Prevention Officer post during 2019/20, to complement whg's already extensive eviction prevention services.

Since the introduction of the HRA in April 2018, we have prevented 499 people from becoming homeless, and where prevention has not been possible we have relieved homelessness in 617 cases. **Target** - at least 50% of successful prevention outcomes are through keeping people in the home by 2025, rather than requiring other accommodation. Walsall's work has been nationally recognised and we were selected to be part of the MHCLG's National HRA Implementation Review Group.

Homelessness takes many forms, and therefore we need to provide more tailored services where required. We will focus on:

- Temporary accommodation (TA) – our TA is currently provided in four flatted blocks. We are now piloting dispersed TA units for families, to enable a more modern and flexible service. Following conclusion of our options appraisal we will purchase or procure more dispersed TA units. **Target** – maximum 0.9 households in Temporary Accommodation per (000s) households.
- Domestic violence – we currently commission FryAccord to provide a refuge service. In 19/20 we are also trialling the provision of dispersed refuge units with Accord. We will extend the existing refuge provision in 20/21, whilst we consider the most appropriate service to commission post 2021 if funds are available. We also provide a Housing Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) service, who works with victims and survivors of domestic abuse primarily dealing with their housing options and providing support. We will extend this post until at least 2021. We have also bid for funding for a Children's Worker to be based at the refuge in 2020/21 who will deliver a range of interventions and activities to support children and their parents
- Young people - continuing the commissioning of a range of options for homeless young people, including care leavers. Walsall council has a number of care leavers who are between 17 to 29 years old. They need help to secure housing and / or support to sustain their existing housing tenancies. Housing options for this group need to include access to affordable and good quality single person accommodation. Walsall Council's Housing and Children's services are working closer together and have established a single housing pathway for young people, and have jointly commissioned a number of services. We have projects in place with YMCA Black Country Supported Lodgings and Night Stop, whg dispersed accommodation, and St Basils for complex young people. Walsall Council's Young Persons Homeless team will continue to work with the Council's Economic team to help get young people into education, training or employment
- Rough sleepers – Walsall Council has built up a comprehensive street homeless prevention service. MHCLG has recognised Walsall's efforts and have awarded significant funding to the local authority to provide these services, which has been integral in Walsall being able to reduce its number of people sleeping rough from 26 in 2016 to 6 in 2019. **Target** – reduction in number of people sleeping rough to 3 by 2025. We will continue to provide these services in 20/21, and our Housing First service will run until at least 2023. The services include:
 - An Outreach Team who are out on the street trying to help our rough sleepers
 - Navigators who work with prisons, hospital and mental health schemes to prevent people leaving these establishments from sleeping rough
 - Winter night shelter and all year round day centre service

- Specialist supported project for street sex workers and vulnerable women
- Our flagship Housing First programme which has been in operation since November 2017 helping to rehouse and support 41 rough sleepers so far.
Target - 88 people to be rehoused and supported in Housing First by April 2021. Housing First is a housing and support approach which provides the individual with a dispersed general needs tenancy (ie not a 'block scheme'), and the choice of open ended intensive support. The support is delivered by FryAccord, and both whg and Accord have provided a significant number of properties for this scheme, with a contribution aswell from Longhurst Group and Watmos

Implementation, Monitoring and Review

This Strategy has been developed with a wide variety of partners, and included a four week public consultation period. It is essential that it is delivered and monitored as a partnership.

The Strategy will be monitored quarterly by the Council's Money Home Job service. It will also be scrutinised and reviewed on an annual basis by:

- Walsall Housing Partnership
- Walsall Homelessness Steering Group
- Walsall Private Landlord Steering Group

A summary of the Strategy's key performance indicators are below:

- 25% affordable housing on all applicable sites
- Keep EPC Bands F and G below 2.53% each year
- 250 households live in safer private rented accommodation by 2025
- 10% reduction in the number of long term (over 6 months) empty homes by 2025
- Actively increase the representation of BAME residents to 23% in our formal consultation processes
- Minimum 250 property adaptations per year
- Minimum 50% of successful prevention outcomes are through keeping people in the home by 2025
- Maximum 0.9 households in Temporary Accommodation per 1000 households.
- Reduction in number of people sleeping rough to 3 by 2025
- 88 people rehoused and supported in Housing First by April 2021