



Cabinet

8 December 2021

Report of: Councillor Robert Bindloss
Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity

Housing Strategy (2021-2026)

Corporate Priority:	Priority 3: Delivering sustainable and inclusive growth in Melton Priority 2: Providing high quality council homes and landlord services
Relevant Ward Member(s):	All
Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):	12 October 2020 (All Member briefing session)
Exempt Information:	No
Key Decision:	No
Subject to call-in:	No

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to recommend the adoption of the Housing Strategy (2021-2026) to Council on the 16th December 2021.
- 1.2 Developing a housing strategy is not a statutory duty for the Council, it is a best practice approach and local authorities are encouraged to create a strategic document that clearly states their housing ambitions and provide a clear and strategic direction for planning and delivering for housing in their area.
- 1.3 The Housing Strategy has been developed through evidence gathering and wide ranging consultation with members, the local community, our partners and wider stakeholders. It has also been drafted to take into consideration of a range of relevant statutory requirements, guidance and national policy initiatives.
- 1.4 Formal public consultation on the draft Housing Strategy took place between 6th August and 15th September 2021. Feedback from the consultation was generally positive and there was a good level of support for the strategy's four proposed objectives. The responses to the consultation have all been taken into consideration and amendments have been made to the final Housing Strategy, which is presented as Appendix A to this report.

2 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 **Notes the outcome of the consultation and the amendments made to the Housing Strategy.**
- 2.2 **Recommends to Council that the final version of the Housing Strategy, set out in appendix A, is adopted.**
- 2.3 **Notes that a Delivery Plan will be developed to support the implementation of the Housing Strategy and that an annual progress report will be reported to Cabinet.**

3 Reason for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Housing Strategy will support the delivery of key priorities for the Council, including Corporate Strategy (2020-2024) priority 2, providing high quality council homes and landlord services, and priority 3, delivering sustainable and inclusive growth in Melton.
- 3.2 Developing a housing strategy is not a statutory duty. However, local authorities are encouraged to create a document that clearly states their housing ambitions and provide a clear and strategic direction for planning and delivering housing in their area. The Housing Strategy will ensure that housing is considered at a strategic level so housing related services and plans are delivered efficiently and effectively in a joined up way.
- 3.3 The Housing Strategy is recommended because it has been robustly developed, having regard to;
 - a) The objectives and priorities of the Corporate Strategy (2020-24)
 - b) The Council's strategic housing responsibilities
 - c) Other statutory and non-statutory guidance, government policy and initiatives
 - d) Substantial analysis and engagement with stakeholders
- 3.4 Feedback on the consultation of the draft Housing Strategy was largely positive and there was strong support from local residents as well as our partners and wider stakeholders for its objectives. The strategy has been finalised by considering and incorporating feedback given, ensuring it more closely reflects local peoples and partners housing priorities.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Housing Strategy has been developed having regard to the objectives and priorities of the Corporate Strategy (2020-24) alongside the Council's strategic housing responsibilities, statutory requirements and guidance, and wider government policy and initiatives. This included a consideration of the ongoing impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic and Brexit on housing as well as proposed new laws, policies and other new requirements expected to come into force over the lifetime of the strategy.
- 4.2 The Housing Strategy has been developed based on substantial research and analysis, the key issues identified have been summarised below;
 - a) A need for housing growth to meet the needs of our growing and aging population

- b) A housing stock which is made up of a larger proportion than average of older, larger, detached and less energy efficient homes which will be challenging to decarbonise
- c) Rising house prices and increasing affordability pressures, made worse by low local incomes levels
- d) High levels of fuel poverty in some of the Borough's rural areas
- e) A lack of socially rented homes and a private rented sector that is not affordable or accessible to those with lower incomes
- f) Falling levels of homeownership, particularly for those under 40
- g) A need to better understand the longer term demand for supported housing, housing care and support, adaptations and other specialist housing options.

4.3 The housing strategy sets out four objectives;

- a) **Delivering Growth:** Delivering sustainable and inclusive housing growth that meets the needs of current and future residents of Melton
- b) **Better Homes:** Ensure that as many homes as possible, in all tenures, are of good quality and support health and wellbeing
- c) **Supporting People:** Support people to access and sustain housing appropriate for their needs
- d) **Sustainable Homes:** Ensure the climate emergency, sustainable living and environmental implications are considered at all stages of planning, delivery and occupations of homes

4.4 The Housing Strategy will be delivered through embedding its objectives within the Council's policies and services and encouraging partners to do the same. A Delivery Plan is proposed to ensure this.

5 Main Considerations

5.1 A Housing Strategy is a key strategic document that sets out a local authority's strategic priorities for housing in their area, usually over a 5 year period. Whilst a housing strategy is not a legal requirement, it is a best practice approach. A housing strategy;

- a) Ensures housing related services and plans are delivered more efficiently and effectively in a joined up way
- b) Communicates local priorities and housing needs to partners and wider stakeholders
- c) Ensures the Council meets its statutory housing duties
- d) Improves oversight, transparency and enable progress to be monitored
- e) Enables the Council to be able to anticipate and adapt to change

5.2 The Housing Strategy will also have positive direct and indirect impacts on health and wellbeing, and the environment, including climate change, across multiple areas. It supports the provision of healthy housing and neighbourhoods, good quality social care and supported housing, aims to reduce homelessness, supports economic prosperity and provide support for those who need it. It also identifies the need to decarbonise housing, live more sustainably and protect and enhance the natural environment.

Consultation Feedback and Proposed Changes

- 5.3 A 6 week public consultation on a draft strategy was undertaken between 6th August and 15th September 2021. This consultation was promoted by the Council, including via social media. The draft strategy consultation was also directly emailed to 280 members of the public who had registered an interest in such Council consultations. A further 320 organisations, businesses and other groups were also directly emailed, this included a range of housing developers and planning professionals, social housing providers, private sector landlords and their agents, Parish Councils and a wide range of other local partners, groups, charities and organisations.
- 5.4 In total there were 56 responses to the survey alongside 6 additional non-survey detailed comment responses. 75% of these responses were made by members of public, the other 25% by a large variety of organisations and stakeholders who represented a good cross section of housing interests.
- 5.5 As part of the formal consultation process for the draft strategy, efforts were made to undertake a series of in depth stakeholder interviews with a wide cross section of housing related organisations. In total 14 interviews were undertaken with the following groups;
- a) Small and large scale local developers and architects, who have worked on a range of projects both within Melton Mowbray as well in the Borough's rural areas
 - b) Social and private sector landlords
 - c) A local money advice service and the Citizen Advice Bureau
 - d) Two locally based climate action groups
 - e) Partners including adult social care, the local healthcare clinical commissioning group and local providers of supported housing
 - f) Homelessness and domestic violence support and accommodation services
- 5.6 The detailed responses to the consultation survey are set out in Appendix B, with the key findings summarised below.

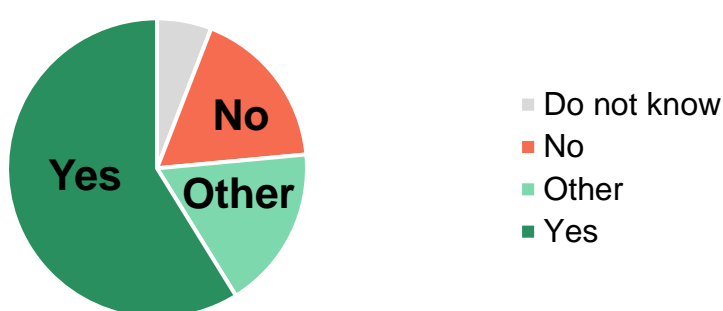
Consultation Survey Responses

- 5.7 Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a series of housing issues on a scale of 1 to 5 stars, these responses were then averaged and ranked by overall importance given to each issue.
- 5.8 The 'climate emergency' and 'infrastructure to support development' were rated as the two top local housing issues. Previous survey questions similar to this have found infrastructure to be the top issue locally. The need for a bypass and road infrastructure has previously dominated such infrastructure concerns, but this survey found the greatest concern to be about healthcare (mainly GP) services, followed by road improvements and then education provision.
- 5.9 The least important housing issues were rated as, 'impacts from the coronavirus pandemic', 'more housing to meet the needs of the growing population' and 'supporting home ownership and first-time buyers'. It is noteworthy that both members of the public and local organisations and groups felt that 'sufficient good quality rented housing' was more important than 'supporting home ownership and first time buyers', however this difference was much larger for organisations/groups (0.8 difference) compared to the public (0.2 difference). This likely reflects the mix of organisations that responded, some of whom confirmed access to the private rented sector is a major barrier for the vulnerable or lower income people they work with.

5.10 Members of the public were also more likely to give higher importance to ‘protecting historic buildings and local character’, ‘quality of existing homes’ as well as ‘quality of new homes’ and give a lower priority to ‘more housing to meet the needs of the growing population’ than other respondents. It is an expected finding, for local people to place greater importance on the quality of the places where they live and be more concerned about the impacts of housing growth.

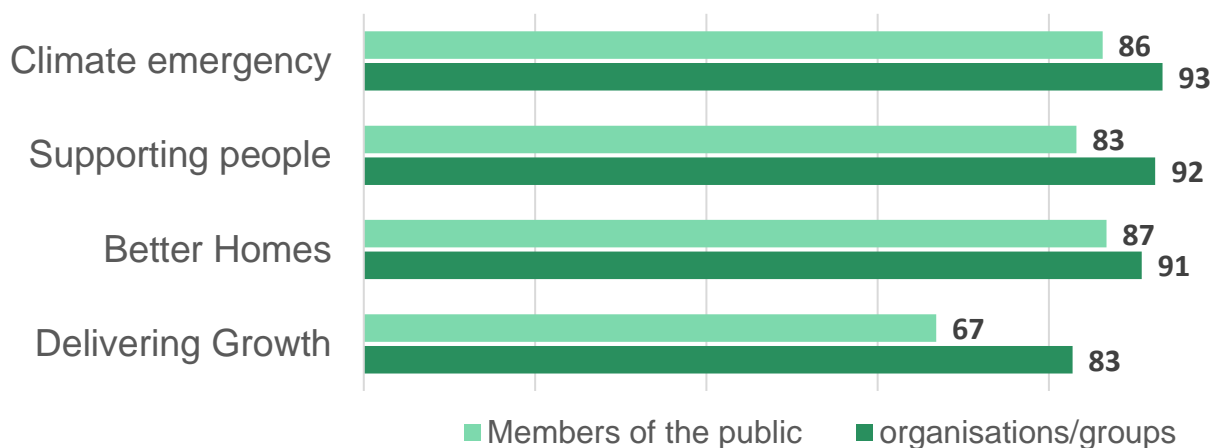
5.11 Respondents were then asked if they supported the objectives as set out in the draft strategy. 59% of respondents supported the objectives and a further 18% responded ‘other’ however this group were also largely in support of the objectives with provisos or comments on specific housing issues. 18% felt that the objectives were incorrect, however none of these respondents suggested any alternative objectives.

Chart 1: Support for the overall Housing Strategy Objectives



5.12 Respondents were also asked to rate each of the four objectives of the Housing Strategy out of 100. Chart 2 shows that members of the public and other respondents to the survey both highly rated the ‘Climate Emergency’, ‘Supporting People’ and ‘Better Homes’ objectives.

Chart 2: Support for each of the four Housing Strategy Objectives



5.13 Members of the public however were less supportive of the ‘Delivering Growth’ objective. Comments made in relation to this often made reference to the impact and design of recent housing developments or the need for more infrastructure before housing growth can be accommodated.

5.14 The last section of the survey asked respondents about the action they would like to see; they were asked what they would like to see the Council do as well as who else they thought needed to take action. These responses are summarised below.

5.15 When asked what they wanted the Council to do people said:

a) Lead by example, use the Council’s assets for sustainable exemplar housing projects

- b) Lobby government for better support, funding and powers to address local housing issues
- c) Get adequate infrastructure in place now
- d) Provide more affordable housing in Melton Mowbray
- e) Deliver more environmentally sustainable housing developments now
- f) Strengthen partnership working
- g) Be flexible and consider a wider variety of housing sizes and types
- h) Think again about where you are building new homes, use more brownfield land and build more in urban areas because they are more sustainable places to live
- i) Take action and deliver what you have set out
- j) More help for homeless people (single adults) who don't qualify for support

5.16 When asked what they wanted other peoples to do, people said:

- a) The Government: needs to help and support local authorities to take local actions
- b) Developers: need to build better quality developments
- c) Clinical Commissioning Group: needs to resolve the growing demand on primary healthcare
- d) All public services: need to work together to deliver the strategy
- e) Other external organisations: need to explore potential partnerships with the Council
- f) Landlords (social and private sector): need to be more accountable
- g) Local People: need to get more involved and hold the Council to account
- h) Local Businesses: provide opportunities for young people

5.17 The stakeholder interviews were a valuable source of detailed information about specific sectors, which allowed an exploration of their perspectives of the housing issues identified in the draft housing strategy. There was strong agreement with the key housing issues and objectives as set out in the draft strategy and many of the interviewees also expressed a strong appetite to work more closely in partnership with the Council to meet our shared priorities.

5.18 The interviews were particularly valuable to advance understanding of the housing issues of younger people, those with increased vulnerability or facing housing crisis, groups that were all underrepresented in the consultation responses made by members of the public. The reported priorities of these groups were very different to members of the public who responded to the survey, they were focused on day to day difficulties, for example, one interviewee stated, 'if you are struggling and having to choose between heating or eating... you don't care about climate change, no one talks to me about that'. Access to the private rented sector or socially rented housing and the cost of living were the key issues from these interviewees.

5.19 The survey responses alongside the 6 detailed written statements received and the stakeholder interviews were then considered, and a series of amendments were made to the strategy. Many amendments were small, the most significant changes are summarised below.

- a) **Changed the 'Climate Emergency' Objective to 'Sustainable Homes'.** The draft strategy called the fourth objective 'Climate Emergency', it has been changed to

address respondents' concerns that its focus was too narrow. The objective now explicitly refers to the climate emergency alongside sustainable living and protecting and enhancing the environment. This amendment also addresses concerns raised about economic and social disadvantage that housing can cause. Additional key actions have also been added to this objective, many comments were made suggesting how to improve this objective, it was clearly an area which respondents were passionate about.

- b) **A greater emphasis on partnership working.** The document has been revised in several places to better highlight existing partnership working and to emphasise how the Council will need to work in partnership with others to achieve the objectives of the housing strategy. The changes also reflect local partners strong interest to work more closely with the Council to deliver the Housing Strategy's objectives.
- c) **Clearer wording about local affordable housing needs.** In response to comments made, additional wording about the type of affordable homes needed has been added into the strategy, for clarity and to enable partners deliver the types of affordable homes which are most needed. The difficulties securing a home to rent in the private sector have also been expanded upon and a stronger emphasis to support people not able to find somewhere to rent privately has been set out, more strongly reflecting local organisations experiences in trying to support their service users find and afford a home.
- d) **The maintenance of open spaces.** Several comments were made about new open and play spaces not being delivered correctly or being maintained poorly. It was agreed that the need to properly maintain new spaces should be included.
- e) **Management of Social Housing.** Several comments were made in relation to the need for good quality tenancy management and that it could be better addressed within the strategy and additional references have been added.
- f) **Thinking beyond fuel poverty statistics.** Concerns were raised about cost of heating/living by a range of partners. New text has been added to reflect these concerns, highlighting that because the official measure of fuel poverty only includes low income households who also have higher than average heating costs, it will exclude a number of other households who are also struggling with rising heating costs.

- 5.20 The consultation feedback strongly supported the main issues that the Council had identified, it also enabled the Council to view these issues from the perspective of local people and organisations. The changes proposed will make the Housing Strategy more comprehensive, inclusive, robust, and they will support more effective partnership working.
- 5.21 If the recommendations are agreed, the Housing Strategy will be presented to Council to be formally adopted on 16th December 2021. Subject to Council approval it will then be published on the Council's website. Consultees who indicated that they were interested in being updated on the progress of the Housing Strategy will also be contacted.
- 5.22 Once adopted, a Delivery Plan will be created to embed and deliver the Housing Strategy. This will be brought to Cabinet for approval and an annual report will be prepared, so progress can be monitored. Any changes to the Council's policies and services to deliver the Housing Strategy will be subject to consideration in their own right and in accordance

with the Council's governance procedures. The Housing Strategy will then be reviewed every 5 years or sooner if monitoring suggests that it is required.

6 Options Considered

6.1 Do nothing:

As it is not a statutory duty the Council could choose to not produce a housing strategy. However, developing a housing strategy provides a clear strategic direction for the Council, its partners and wider stakeholders on local housing issues and the actions required to address them. Local authorities are required to ensure that their Homelessness Strategy, Allocations Policy and Tenancy Strategy 'have regard' to one another and developing an overarching strategic housing strategy is considered a good way to ensure this. Having a strategic vision for housing provides direction for a range of Council priorities such as development of planning policies, social housing policies and management, community empowerment and responding to climate change. Given consideration to this, not having a Housing Strategy is not recommended as an option.

6.2 Consider a different set of priorities:

There is no standard methodology for developing a housing strategy and a number of options were considered in order to develop it. A set of clear potential priorities emerged from the evidence gathering stage and it was decided that they should be used to engage others and support the development of a draft strategy. The consultation process has validated this approach and priorities and therefore it is not recommended to change the core of the strategy.

6.3 Approve the strategy:

For the reasons above and as identified in section 3, it is recommended to approve the strategy.

7 Consultation

7.1 The Housing Strategy has been developed through consultation with members, the local community, partners, and wider stakeholders. Members took part in an all member briefing in October 2020 and this alongside informal discussions internally and externally with partners supported the development of a draft strategy. This first draft was considered by members of the Scrutiny committee in February 2021 and further revised. The Portfolio holders for both Growth and Prosperity and Council Homes and Landlord Services have also both been consulted at each stage as the strategy has progressed.

7.2 A 6 week public consultation on the draft strategy was undertaken between 6th August and 15th September 2021. The consultation report is attached as Appendix B.

8 Next Steps – Implementation and Communication

8.1 If recommendation 2.2 is agreed, the Housing Strategy will be presented to Council to be formally adopted on 16th December 2021. Once adopted, the Housing Strategy will be published and become a key consideration in the planning and delivery of Council housing

related services, plans and policies and promoted to be used likewise by wider delivery partners.

- 8.2 Following adoption a Delivery Plan will be prepared, this will set out specific actions and targets for the delivery of the Housing Strategy. This will be presented to Cabinet for consideration and approval by April 2022. An annual progress report to Cabinet will thereafter monitor progress.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 Approval of the Housing Strategy does not in itself incur any new revenue or capital liabilities for either the Housing Revenue Account or the general fund.
- 9.2 The housing strategy is a high level strategic document. It will be delivered through embedding its objectives within the Council's policies and services and encouraging partners to do the same. The policies and plans that will sit underneath and deliver the Housing Strategy will be subject to their own financial considerations.
- 9.3 If any new proposals in support of the strategy come forward for consideration, the full revenue and capital implications will be made clear at the time to Cabinet, or individual members making decisions under delegated authority. Approval of the Housing Strategy will not fetter members' future decision-making.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Director for Corporate Services

10 Legal and Governance Implications

- 10.1 There is no legal requirement to have a housing strategy as the Deregulation Act 2015 abolished the statutory requirement for English authorities to produce a housing strategy as previously required by section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 10.2 Under the Localism Act 2011 there is a requirement for the Council to have various strategies in place such as Homelessness Strategy, Tenancy Strategy and an Allocations Policy which all have regard to each other. This document will provide a strategic document incorporating all strategies and housing ambitions whilst providing a clear and strategic direction for planning and delivering for housing in the area.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Monitoring Officer

11 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

- 11.1 Housing is a basic need for all people and therefore the Housing Strategy has potential to impact all current and future residents in the Melton Borough across all the protected characteristic group.
- 11.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was undertaken to inform the development of the draft Housing Strategy. The EIA did find that certain groups of people are more likely to live in certain tenures or types of housing and therefore some housing policies have the potential to impact different groups in different ways. Many of the difference relate to differences in incomes, life skills and health (mental and physical). Examples include,
- disabled people are much more likely to live in socially rented housing

- older people are more likely to need housing care and support
- single parent households who live in the private rented sector with the support of housing benefit are much more likely to be female

- 11.3 The EIA formed part of the public consultation and comments were invited on it alongside the draft strategy, including from the Council's Check and Challenge group. The consultation also specifically targeted a wide range of groups that work with or represent people from protected characteristic groups. Feedback provided was used to finalise the strategy.
- 11.4 The housing strategy is a high level strategic document. It will be delivered through embedding its objectives within the Council's policies and services and encouraging partners to do the same. The policies and plans that will sit underneath the Housing Strategy will each be subject to their own consultation process, EIA assessment and safeguarding considerations.

12 Community Safety Implications

- 12.1 Although the Housing Strategy does not have any direct impacts on community safety, it promotes community safety, good tenancy management, support for vulnerable people and good quality and safe public spaces.
- 12.2 The housing strategy is a high level strategic document which will be delivered through embedding its objectives within the Council's policies and services and encouraging partners to do the same. The policies and plans that will sit underneath the Housing Strategy which may have direct impacts on community safety will be subject to their own community safety considerations.

13 Environmental and Climate Change Implications

- 13.1 Sustainable Homes is one of the four key objectives of the Housing Strategy. It sets out the need for the climate emergency, sustainable living and enhancing the natural environment to be key considerations at all stages of planning, delivery and occupations of homes.
- 13.2 The Housing Strategy identifies the need to decarbonise housing over the next 30 years which will be a significant local challenge. It also sets out the need for people to live more sustainably and protect and enhance the natural environment.
- 13.3 The Housing Strategy will be delivered through embedding its objectives within the Council's policies and services and encouraging partners to do the same and the Sustainable Homes objective will ensure that environmental and climate change implications are a key consideration in them.

14 Other Implications (where significant)

Health and Wellbeing Implications:

- 14.1 Housing is a crucial component of wellbeing. Good quality housing, which meets an individual's or family's needs, provides a sound platform to build a good quality of life. Poor quality or inadequate housing tends to be associated with poorer outcomes for

people, whether that relates to the health impacts of living in damp or overcrowded conditions or the impact poor housing has on children's attainment at school.

- 14.2 The Housing Strategy will have positive direct and indirect impacts on health and wellbeing across multiple areas. It supports the provision of healthy housing, good quality social care and supported housing, aims to reduce homelessness, supports economic prosperity and provide support for those who need it. It also supports good quality environments, well connected cycling and walking routes, and good quality public spaces that also benefit our mental health and wellbeing.

15 Risk & Mitigation

Risk No	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk
1	The Housing Strategy is not adopted by Council	Low	Marginal	Low Risk
2	Housing Strategy does not address local needs effectively	Very Low	Marginal	Low Risk
3	The Housing Strategy is not effective	Low	Marginal	Low Risk

		Impact / Consequences			
		Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Likelihood	Score/ definition	1	2	3	4
	6 Very High				
	5 High				
	4 Significant				
	3 Low		1, 3		
	2 Very Low		2		
	1 Almost impossible				

Risk No	Mitigation
1	Officers have worked closely with Members to develop the Housing Strategy, requesting feedback as it has progressed
1, 2 & 3	The housing strategy has been developed through extensive analysis and consultation to ensure that it identifies and addressed local housing needs
1	The Housing Strategy is not a statutory requirement, it is a strategic framework, and if a housing strategy is not adopted the Council would continue to meet its strategic housing responsibilities as it currently does. The housing strategy will enable the Council to do so more effectively and strategically.
2 & 3	The Housing strategy will be regularly monitored and fully reviewed at least every 5 years to ensure that it remains effective. An annual report will be taken to Cabinet as part of this process.
3	A Delivery Plan will be established to embed the Housing Strategy within the Council's and wider partners housing functions

16 Background Papers

16.1 There are no background papers

17 Appendices

17.1 Appendix A – Housing Strategy (2021-2026)

17.2 Appendix B – Consultation Feedback

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