



Affordable, Available and Decent Homes

West Suffolk Council's Housing,
Homelessness Reduction and
Rough Sleeping Strategy

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1 Executive summary

Foreword



There are huge challenges around housing for people in West Suffolk.

Being able to find a good decent home that people can afford is pivotal to their health, and their ability to participate in their local communities.

And struggling to keep up with rising rents and huge mortgage rate rises can put huge pressures on families leading to arguments, relationships breaking down, and people becoming homeless.

Decent homes are the cornerstone on which lives and communities are built.

That's why this strategy is so crucial. It's about ensuring enough houses are being built, in the right locations, with the right mix of homes for single people and families taking into account issues such as age and disability. Ensuring the right infrastructure including transport, education and sustainability are also essential to enable communities to thrive.

It's about the delivery of more homes that are genuinely affordable. This will then play a part in reducing some of the causes of homelessness.

But our challenges aren't just about what people can afford. It's how we ensure better living conditions in the private rented sector, preventing overcrowding and people living in cold, damp homes in poor disrepair all of which can have a serious impact on people's health.

It's about how we will help combat fuel poverty by addressing issues of poor energy efficiency in homes.

And it's about how we support an ageing population as they develop health issues, to continue to be able to get around and enjoy their home rather than having to go into care or hospital which can be devastating both for the individual and their family.

And it's about how we build on the work we are doing to address the growing numbers of people facing homelessness, and helping those who are rough sleeping.

This Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out clear priorities for West Suffolk to enable a strong housing offer that provides affordable, accessible, sustainable, and suitable choices at all stages of life. It sets out a framework for the issues that we need to tackle and how we aim to do so, and how, through taking a partnership approach, we can make a real difference to people's lives in West Suffolk.

Finally, this strategy has been shaped through engagement with residents and key partners. I would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who has fed into this, your input has been invaluable.

Richard O'Driscoll
Portfolio Holder for Housing



"A strategy to help more people better afford a place to live, improve living conditions and reduce homelessness"



Introduction

The impact of insufficient housing, and particularly affordable housing, is having a devastating impact on residents in West Suffolk. In West Suffolk, we know that whilst we have been successful in delivering new homes, the new Government has identified that we need to ensure more homes are built and it has consulted on a revised National Planning Policy Framework increasing the housing numbers for many authorities including West Suffolk. In addition, we need to focus on the right type and mix of housing and not just volume as well as the right affordable housing products to meet the needs of residents.

There are a range of challenges. Affordability and the environment, cost and availability of land, infrastructure requirements to support sustainable growth, build costs and supply issues in the construction industry are all interlinked. The number of older people and single-person households is expected to increase and this will impact on the type of homes needed, including adaptable homes with increased demand for one- and two-bedroom properties. The lack of housing is a direct factor in overcrowding in existing homes which has a knock-on effect on health and social inequality. Legislation and policy will ensure the improvement in the environmental performance of new build homes but retrofitting existing housing stock is a significant challenge. This is important not just to reduce the impact on the environment but to provide good quality warm homes that are affordable to run, impacting positively on people's lives and finances.



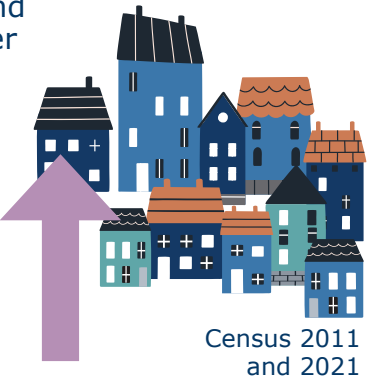
West Suffolk's proximity to Cambridge and the presence of the US visiting forces population (more than 11,000 personnel and dependents) have a significant impact on the affordability and availability of housing in the district, with the ratio of lower quartile earnings to lower quartile house prices being 9.46 (compared to an England average of 7.36 (ONS, 2022)). Delivering large numbers of new homes is challenging in the district, however, because of the constraints presented by the needs of the US military and the horseracing industry, as well as significant areas of land with conservation designations (around 30 per cent of the district), particularly around Brandon. These affordability and availability challenges have impacts on a range of issues, including social and economic mobility, deprivation and homelessness.

West Suffolk's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets the direction and priorities for how we, together with partners, are going to address the housing and homelessness challenges in West Suffolk and across the Suffolk system. The delivery of this housing strategy will improve quality of life, help more people benefit from the opportunities our district has to offer, and contribute towards the achievement of our strategic priority for housing which is to deliver affordable, available and decent homes.

Need for more homes

Between 2011 and 2021, the number of households in West Suffolk increased by

10.60%, compared to an increase of **6.20%** in England.

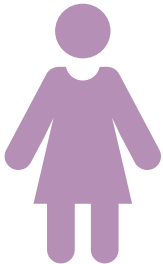


Future population change

↑ 86% increase

= 10,500 people

is predicted in the population aged 85+ in West Suffolk between 2020 and 2040 (70% in England)



The **age group 65+ is the only age group projected to increase over the next 20 years.** The proportion of people of working age is projected to decline.

Office for National Statistics (ONS), Sub-national population projections - 2018 based

Cost of renting a home

The average (mean) cost of renting a 3 bedroomed home per month in West Suffolk in 2022-23 was **£1,171** in West Suffolk, compared to **£1,039** in England as a whole.



Office for National Statistics private rental market summary April 22 – March 23

West Suffolk Council’s strategic context

So that we can move forward with our ambitions to address the housing and homelessness challenges in West Suffolk, we need to maximise the powers we have to tackle the issues presented and set this in the council’s work and overall ambition for the district. West Suffolk’s Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy therefore sits alongside, and is aligned with a number of other key council strategies. In particular, this strategy speaks to the council’s strategic priorities for the period 2024 to 2028, focused on responding to the issues and challenges we face, while building on the strengths of our local area.

The strategy is also set within the context of a number of other council strategies and plans including West Suffolk’s local plan, West Suffolk Growth Investments Strategy, Barley Homes (the council’s property company), West Suffolk Lettings Policy, Environment and Climate Change Action Plans and the Families and Communities approach. Also the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board and Safe Suffolk Renters.

The council’s overall vision is that – **working across West Suffolk, we will support the district to flourish by focusing on the delivery of:**





Purpose of the Strategy

The commitments already published in our [strategic priorities](#) are developed further through this strategy and action plan, are backed by funding and we have engaged with our communities and partners to establish how we will work to enable more people to find the right home in the right place in West Suffolk, with opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing.

The purpose of this strategy is to:

- Set out a shared understanding of need and demand for all types of housing, and for housing services now and how we will work to maximise supply of the right homes and enable more people to access affordable homes in future;
- Provide clear strategic direction for housing investment including the development of new homes as well as investment in existing housing;
- Set out actions to improve the quality, condition and energy efficiency of homes;
- Provide a strong contribution to the integration of housing, health and social care services to enable independent living and improved wellbeing outcomes with the right infrastructure in place; and
- Set the framework to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping wherever possible and to resolve homelessness quickly and effectively when it does occur.

In short, we will focus on:

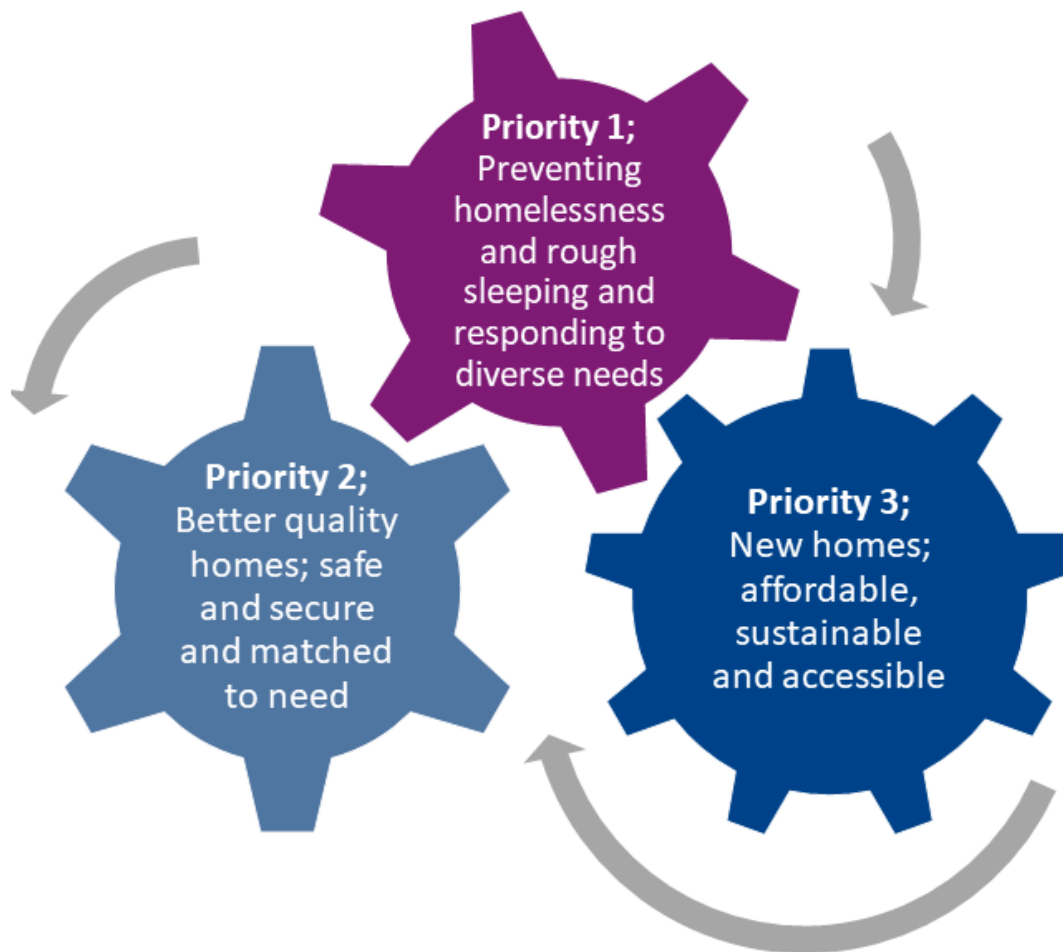
- increasing the rate of housing delivery for the right type of housing to meet different needs;
- increasing affordable housing including homes for social rent;
- improving energy efficiency and standards in existing housing and
- engaging, educating and supporting households at an earlier stage to ensure homelessness prevention before a crisis point is reached.

We will make a start on delivering these objectives through an immediate set of priority actions designed to deliver the greatest possible impact on the priorities in our strategy. As a local authority, working with our partners, we will need to use a range of tools, our powers and influence.

2 Our housing priorities



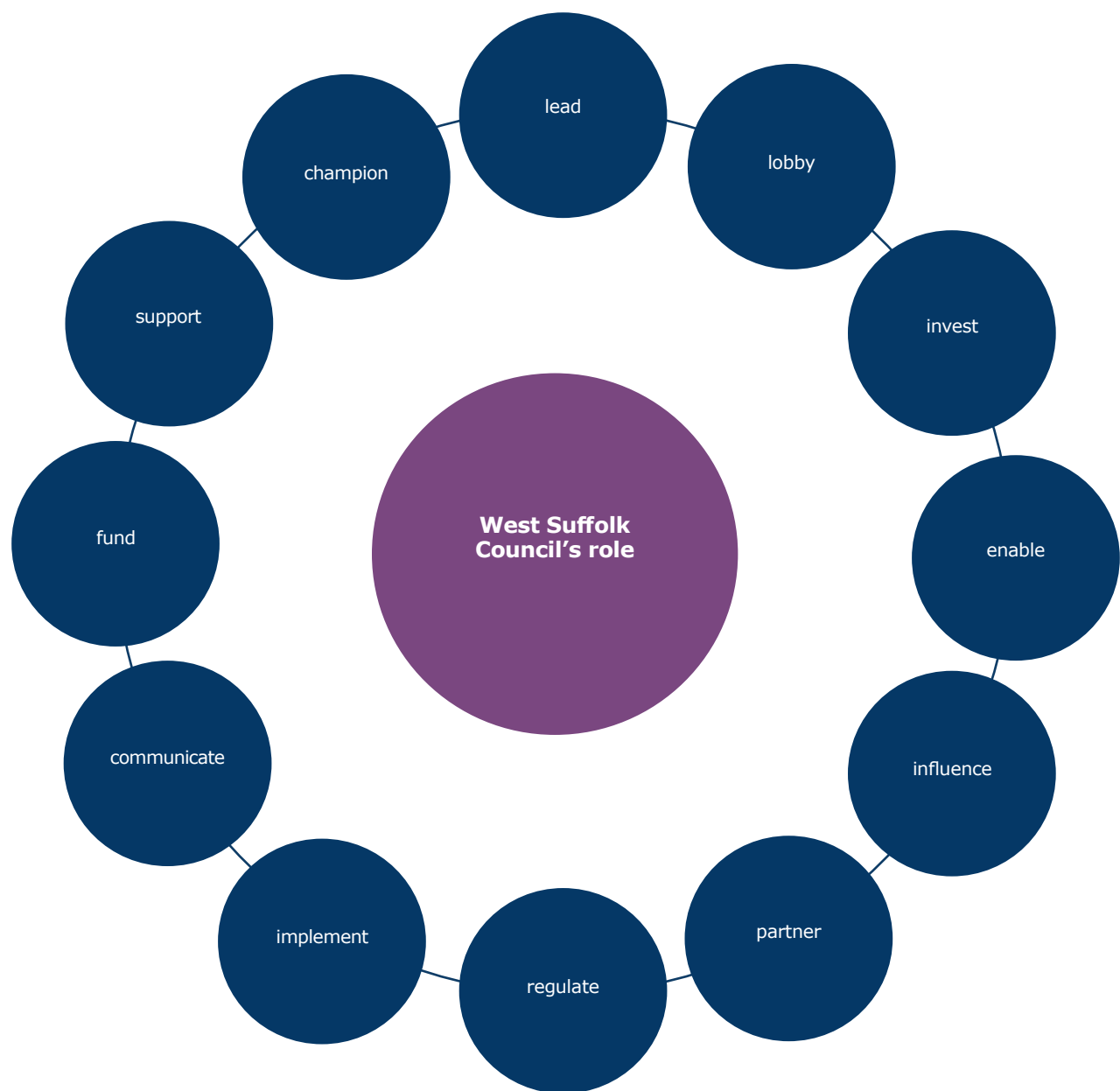
To deliver our vision for affordable, available and decent homes, we will use our role to focus on three priorities. These are explained further at page 17 to 25 and a full action plan is available at [Appendix A](#).



Our role

West Suffolk Council has a statutory duty to provide certain services including managing a housing register, assisting households facing homelessness, and acting to improve poor housing conditions. We also have a requirement to play a significant role in delivering housing numbers by allocating sites in our local plan and shaping quality of homes and places through the planning and building control systems. The council also undertakes a supporting and enabling role including supporting our registered provider partners to develop new affordable homes and to improve their existing homes.

It is important that we acknowledge there are factors outside of our control such as the availability of land, the aspirations of developers in the delivery of affordable housing, as we look at options outside of the local plan, and how partners work together across the Suffolk system to benefit residents.



Our working principles

In order to deliver the strategy, there are a number of key working principles that are important to the way we work and will underpin our approach:



3 Housing in the wider context



We need to be flexible around how we deliver against our actions in the context of the changing national, political and policy context, the diverse needs of residents and economic circumstances, ensuring that we make the best use of our financial resources.

National context

The council considers its duties in the context of the following legislation:

- Localism Act 2011
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Deregulation Act 2015
- Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016
- Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2018
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2018
- Housing and Planning Act 2018
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Health and Social Care Act 2012
- Children and Social Care Act 2017
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Decent Homes Standard
- Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards

The benefits of affordable, available and decent housing in the wider Suffolk context

Our commitment to addressing the link between housing, health and sustainable growth to deliver better outcomes for residents has been renewed.

The importance of setting housing in this wider context has been evident as we have developed this strategy, and most importantly in response to engagement with residents, stakeholder and partner organisations. This includes supporting vulnerable people and those with mental and physical health issues.

As a local authority, we cannot do this alone, but we want to work with and support our partners to bring change across West Suffolk that will result in better outcomes for residents and more effective working across already established, as well as new, partnerships. We want to embed system working at the earliest opportunity to prevent crisis point for households and create places that support the needs of residents. Working with partners we want to:

- Address the need for safe and secure housing as part of a whole system approach.
- Integrate housing need with the wider challenges faced by individuals and communities around health and employment (in particular supporting vulnerable people and those with mental and physical health issues).
- Explore the opportunity for a shared system-wide strategy backed by funding to deliver and plan for aspirational services.

4 Background and evidence



A full evidence base is available at [Appendix B](#) and homelessness review available at [Appendix C](#) together with the feedback from public and stakeholder consultation sets out key information and provides insights that underpins and informs this strategy. Building on the achievements to date and understanding the challenges and pressures being faced in West Suffolk, we have taken this learning to develop this new strategy document.

Our journey

A review of the Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan 2018 to 2024 was undertaken during 2021. Updates on progress against the Housing Delivery Action Plan and Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Delivery Plan were also undertaken regularly since they were first adopted by Cabinet in 2018. There has been significant progress and achievements since the implementation of the last strategic documents.

We:

- made significant progress in preparing an up-to-date local plan, in December 2023 agreed to undertake the final consultation to enable it to be submitted for Examination, which will take place in November 2024. This aims to increase the percentage of affordable housing delivered and the quality, sustainability and accessibility of future homes
- exceeded our Housing Delivery Test (HDT) target of 95 per cent: achieved 129 per cent
- total number of (net) homes delivered in 2023 to 2024: 611
- total number of (gross) affordable homes completed in 2023 to 2024: 210 and
- all sites (with the exception of one for viability issues) of 10 or more homes delivered achieved 30 per cent affordable housing.

Continually working with developers and registered providers, **six adapted and accessible properties** were brought forward. More households are being

supported to live safely, comfortably and independently in their own home for as long as possible through Independent Living Suffolk (ILS), a service provided by Suffolk County Council in partnership with local district and borough councils. Improved safety and living standards in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) have been achieved through an in-depth review of data and exploring how we work with landlords, support tenants and undertake inspections.

We have provided support with a focus on preventing and relieving homelessness to ensure that more people are able to maintain and secure a settled home.

In 2023 to 2024 in West Suffolk, 49.0 per cent of those owed a duty had a successful prevention duty outcome (compared to 51.0 per cent across England and 26.1 per cent has a successful relief duty outcome (compared to 32.1 per cent across England).

Government funding has been utilised to deliver services and provide accommodation through:

- £453,359 Rough Sleeper Initiative funding (2020 to 2021) (joint bid with Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils)
- £1,316,852 (2022 to 2025) Rough Sleeper Initiative funding including additional funding in 2023 to provide rough sleeper beds and support staff on top of the existing provision
- £634,099 of capital and revenue funding with additional funding of £131,220 to continue the support of this provision until March 2025 as part of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) to accommodate 14 former rough sleepers
- £1,426,858 Local Authority Housing Funding to deliver ten units of accommodation in partnership with local registered providers for the resettlement of Afghans, Ukrainians and for general needs use.

Housing need

The Cambridge and West Suffolk Housing Needs Assessment: Cambridgeshire Insight – Housing needs of specific groups was conducted in 2021, and set out the amount and type of housing that is required in West Suffolk (and the wider Cambridgeshire sub-region) between 2020 and 2040.

The report highlighted the need for **800 additional dwellings per annum** in West Suffolk with **51 per cent being affordable housing**. West Suffolk is meeting the delivery target of **30 per cent affordable housing** on new developments, however there continues to be unmet demand for this type of housing. We are seeing continued demand for one-bed accommodation and dwellings for larger families as well as more specialist housing to help support our ageing populations and those with chronic disabilities.

Affordable housing includes social rent, affordable rent and intermediate accommodation, such as shared ownership which is to in part rent and in part buy a property. These terms, and affordable housing generally, are defined in [Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2018](#).

A [housing evidence update report](#) published in December 2023, provided an update to the Affordable Housing Need, Housing Mix and First Homes chapters of the 2021 report but with a focus specifically on West Suffolk. The updated evidence highlighted an increased need for **806 additional dwellings per annum** in West Suffolk with 61 per cent being for affordable housing. Taking this into account, the council is exploring options to help increase the delivery of affordable housing in a number of ways through the local plan process such as rural exception sites, community land trusts, self-build and a refresh of the [Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document](#).

Government has consulted on a new National Planning Framework and other changes to the planning system which has increased housing numbers for many local authorities including West Suffolk. We will continue to update our evidence in light of new policy requirements to inform the preparation and delivery of our next Local Plan (2025 onwards).

A general (national and local) shortage of housing is resulting in an increased need for affordable housing. Opportunities through schemes such as Help to Buy has helped support the number of people to buy a home instead of rent. This scheme however closed in April 2023.

As a council, we want to do more to understand the barriers for young people to access housing across West Suffolk. The number of households with non-dependent children in West Suffolk according to the 2021 Census is 6837 (8.7 per cent). This indicates the difficulties faced by a significant minority of young people in accessing housing. As a result of being deemed a low priority for social housing and having few options in the private sector on account of a low income, young people may need to remain in the parental home. That said, the proportion of households with non-dependent children in West Suffolk however is slightly lower than that seen in the East of England (10.6 per cent) and England (10.5 per cent).

Taking the above into account the **Housing Evidence Update report 2023** updates the average (mean) income is estimated to be around £49,300, with a median income of £41,300 and the lower quartile income of all households is estimated to be £23,600. At £900 per calendar month, the lower quartile rent levels in West Suffolk which is above average in comparison to those seen nationally (a lower quartile rent of £625 for England in the year to September 2022) this would suggest that a proportion of income to be spent on housing is likely to be higher than the reasonable threshold of 30 per cent. To afford a £900 per calendar month rent would imply a gross household income of about £36,000 (and the rent would likely be around 38 per cent of net income).

The income thresholds for owner-occupation, assumes a household needs to have a 10 per cent deposit and can secure a mortgage for four and a half times their salary. These assumptions are considered to be broadly in line with typical lending practices although it is recognised that there will be differences on a case-by-case basis. The table below shows the estimated incomes required to both buy and rent (privately) – and shows a notable 'gap' in income requirements.

Estimated household income required to buy and privately rent in West Suffolk

<u>To buy</u>	<u>To rent</u>
£45,500	£36,000

Income gap
£9,500

Taking this into account, it is therefore important to consider market entry products within affordable housing requirements such as rent to buy or build to rent.

Housing Delivery

Housing delivery over the past three years has been varied, with an average yearly supply of 896 homes, of which 289 (around 32 per cent) were affordable. Although West Suffolk has met its overall housing target of 800 new homes per annum, we have not managed to deliver our affordable housing need. We have however, largely delivered against our adopted affordable housing policy target of 30 per cent and since 2019 we have secured a total of 1,303 new affordable homes including social rent, affordable rent, and shared ownership homes.

Housing evidence base and homelessness review

We have developed this strategy by reviewing the progress achieved against the previous Housing Strategy and the previous Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy and by understanding the challenges that still need to be addressed.

Data contained in the evidence base, available at [Appendix B](#), and homelessness review, available at [Appendix C](#), have informed our understanding of the need for housing and type of housing, the vulnerabilities of groups such as those with mental and physical disabilities and young people that will benefit from particular types of housing or housing tenures.

Key challenges were identified:

- Delivering the right mix of housing type and volume for different needs, including
 - People with complex needs that require a whole system approach and
 - Responding to and understanding the needs of an ageing population
- Lack of affordable housing - demand for affordable housing outstrips supply
- Cost of living crisis means rent and mortgage costs increasingly unaffordable
- Higher housing and rental costs given Cambridge and impact of US military personnel on rented sector and
- Ensuring decent homes are available in the private rented sector and in the social housing sector – poor quality housing directly linked to poor health outcomes and impact on the environment.

Public and stakeholder consultation

During 2024, we carried out extensive consultation and engagement on the priorities and actions now set out in this strategy through a public and stakeholder online survey, workshops with Members and met with a number of our partners and key stakeholders. A full list of the consultation and engagement undertaken is set out at [Appendix D](#). We also had detailed conversations with our partners on how we can continue to build on the way we work together to improve the lives of residents, as described above. We have also engaged with people in a number of localities and specific groups to understand the challenges they face and how we can continue to working together in the future.

The feedback and discussions have given us clear messages that have fed into, and have been critical, to developing our aspirations for housing in West Suffolk. This is set in the context of health and economic growth and how we want to work, with partners, to deliver better outcomes for residents. Key themes emerging from that consultation were:

- Delivering more homes including affordable – providing the right housing for different needs
- Reducing the number of empty homes
- Supporting for tenants in the private rented sector
- Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping at an earlier stage and
- That a holistic approach is needed across the system (strategic and operational) to help individuals.



Evidence from across the Suffolk system

We have utilised a range of information from residents and service users to help us understand the important issues - such as evidence from the Local Plan process, the [Housing and Health Needs Assessment 2024](#), the [Housing Stock Condition Database](#), [Safe Suffolk Renters](#), a Suffolk-wide initiative backed by government funding with the aim of improving standards in the private rented sector, customer satisfaction surveys and the lived experience of rough sleepers through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme and development of the system approach to rough sleeping that seeks to prevent rough sleeping through partnership working across the Suffolk system.

5 Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion

The strategic priorities set out our value of being fair and inclusive. It means that, 'in everything we do, we will promote equality and diversity by seeking to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different groups of people through all aspects of our work across West Suffolk.'

Homelessness affects people and communities differently in West Suffolk and certain groups are disproportionately affected by homelessness and poor housing conditions.

Our Housing, Homelessness, Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy is underpinned by this value and informs our plans throughout the priorities. We will ensure that our services are accessible, that policies do not discriminate and through feedback, data and intelligence we understand the needs of communities in West Suffolk and those seeking our support. The evidence base and homelessness review provides further information and data. An equality analysis is available at [Appendix E](#).



6 Our priorities and actions



Priority one

Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping and responding to diverse needs

The local context

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis coupled with affordability of rent levels and housing costs means that more households are facing homelessness. In recent years, we have seen a shift towards more people seeking assistance when they are already homeless, or at the relief stage. In 2023 to 2024, 315 households were threatened with homelessness and were owed a prevention duty and 575 were homeless and owed a relief duty. In addition, complex personal needs and circumstances mean some individuals struggle to maintain a home or tenancy. There have been a range of government funded projects that serve to address the wide range of issues. The actions in this strategy seek to build on that and also act, with partners, to address the underlying challenges and issues that contribute to households facing homelessness.

The following themes will be our key areas of focus and are included in our priority actions.

Work with partners to end rough sleeping

To end the need for people to sleep rough in West Suffolk, we want to prevent them from ending up on the street in the first place. In order to ensure this happens, it is essential that we have the right accommodation and support options in place and that these are delivered in partnership across Suffolk. We want to ensure that rough sleeping is prevented wherever possible, and where it does occur, that it is brief and non-recurrent.

A system wide approach to preventing rough sleeping has been developed as a result of the county, districts and boroughs and partners including health organisations working together to prevent and tackle rough sleeping. The focus is around moving from a crisis management to an early intervention and prevention focus and developing a collaborative and sustainable approach that builds on good practice developed during Everyone In, the Government's response to

rough sleeping during COVID-19. This Suffolk approach will drive and inform much of our work in this area.

Priority action

Work with the Suffolk Housing Board to plan for the end of Rough Sleeping Initiative funding. Implement local provision to address Suffolk County Council reduction of Housing Related Support funding.

Provide high quality, accessible and timely Housing Advice services to all residents and local people in need, focusing on early prevention

We know that residents in West Suffolk are experiencing housing difficulties. This could be due to cost-of-living pressures making rent and mortgage costs unaffordable in an already competitive private rented sector market. There are also issues around the insufficient supply of affordable housing, and personal factors such as an increasing number of individuals with complex needs and relationship breakdown.

We know that supporting households at an early stage to prevent homelessness and help households stay in their homes leads to better outcomes. In April 2018, the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) was introduced with new duties on local authorities and refocused statutory homelessness services on prevention of homelessness, with a more person-centred and collaborative approach. We have successfully implemented the requirements of the act and have worked hard to prevent homelessness.

With this new strategy we want to renew our emphasis on tackling homelessness with more focus on preventative services that come into effect at an earlier stage and are more 'upstream', so that we can help people stay in their homes wherever possible.

By focusing our resources on early prevention and working effectively with our partners, we want to ensure the delivery of services that are complementary and support our residents and those in greatest need.

Facilitate access to suitable accommodation

Our focus is on preventing homelessness which then avoids the need for households to stay in temporary accommodation and find alternative accommodation, but we understand this is not always possible. We want to continue to increase and improve the range of housing options available to prevent homelessness and meet rehousing needs. The housing team proactively sources a range of accommodation options either through direct provision, making use of Government funding such as the Local Authority Housing Fund, or by working with local providers.

Through this strategy we are also renewing our emphasis on responding to the increased need to discharge the council's homelessness duty into the private rented sector through the council's West Suffolk Lettings Partnership. This will result in reduced spend on temporary accommodation.

By helping residents to find, access and maintain suitable and affordable accommodation this will improve outcomes for households that need to find alternative accommodation and links with our priority to support residents.

Build and maintain partnerships that support residents

Through this strategy we want to continue to work with partners to make sure that partnerships, processes and the right resources are in place to support residents, including the vulnerable. Across Suffolk we have the structures in place to build on partnerships such as through 'Everyone In', [Independent Living Suffolk](#), the [Safe Suffolk Renters](#) project and responding to the [Suffolk Housing and Health Needs Assessment](#). Local authorities and public sector bodies are under significant financial pressure, and whilst demand for our services is likely to increase, there is no further funds available to increase our resources. It is therefore more important than ever to ensure the best possible outcomes for local residents.

Priority actions

Work with partners to promote early education, life skills development and training opportunities.

Work with partners to deliver family mediation and collaborative prevention work and undertake targeted and effective advertising of the Housing Options Service.

Priority actions

Increase access to private sector rented housing, including expansion of the council's West Suffolk Lettings Partnership. Explore potential new options for single homeless and move-on.

Respond to Suffolk County Council's reduction in housing related support to ensure those people that West Suffolk Council owes a housing duty to are effectively supported.

Priority action

Review our needs, and work with our partners, to explore how we can address the supply for high quality temporary and emergency accommodation and appropriate service offer including for high-risk applicants and deliver accordingly.

Priority two

Better quality homes; safe and secure and matched to need

The local context

Everyone has the right to live in a warm, safe and decent home. Energy and water efficiency is essential in reducing carbon emissions and helping to make homes more affordable to live in. Poor housing conditions can have a significant impact on people’s physical and mental health; and on educational achievement and future life-chances.

The following themes will be our key areas of focus and are included in our priority actions.

Private rented sector

Everyone living in a rented property should have well maintained homes and services that meet minimum standards. Living in a home which is cold, damp, overcrowded or in poor repair can lead to health problems, which in turn can impact negatively on community safety and cause environmental problems, as well as leading to increased costs for healthcare providers.

The private rented sector in West Suffolk accounts for 21 per cent of all households, larger than the social rented sector at 17 per cent, with owner occupation, which accounts for 60 per cent of households. Source: [Building Research Establishment \(BRE\) – Housing Stock Conditions Database](#)

Work with partners

Working with key partners will be essential to deliver on our ambition. In particular continuing to work with our registered providers of social housing is essential to ensure the social housing sector is viable and delivering homes that meet needs.

Priority action

Build on the success of the Government funded Safer Suffolk Renters (SSR) project to raise standards of homes in the private rented sector and continue to support better landlords, tenants and property managers.



Priority action

Develop closer links with registered providers with a focus on under occupation, allocation policies, tenancy strategies, as well as asset management (including use of adapted and adaptable accommodation), investment plans and net zero carbon road maps.

Houses in multiple occupation

Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) can form a vital source of housing, traditionally providing housing at the more affordable and transient end of the housing market. HMOs provide essential and affordable accommodation to many including residents on a low income and young professionals. It is acknowledged that HMOs often house the most vulnerable in society and are known to present a high risk in terms of general property standards and fire safety. Poorly run HMOs can also have a much wider impact in relation to the community impact of HMOs, such as crime, antisocial behaviour (ASB) and tackling vulnerability and safeguarding matters, which all impact on quality of living in neighbourhoods.

Across West Suffolk, there are 115 known non-licensable HMOs (this means a property with three or four people sharing facilities but not from the same household) and 111 licensed HMOs which require a Mandatory HMO Licence due to housing five or more occupants.

There is no requirement to register or notify the Council unless the property requires an HMO licence. The BRE report estimates that there are significantly more hidden HMOs (approximately 1967) operating within West Suffolk which have never been inspected. Of concern it is estimated 493 require an HMO licence indicating there are a large number of hidden non-compliant and potentially unsafe HMOs operating under the radar.

Energy efficient homes

Fuel poverty occurs when a household is unable to keep their home adequately heated. Fuel poverty is driven by three main factors, which are: household income, the current cost of energy and the energy efficiency of a home.

Across Suffolk, public sector leaders have agreed an ambition for Suffolk to be net zero by 2030. [Suffolk County Council – Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan](#) sets out the ambition and highlights what the significant challenges will be to improve energy efficiency in West Suffolk homes, which account for over 25 per cent of total emissions in the area. The plan includes a number of actions to support homeowners, tenants and landlords.

Priority action

Actively contribute to development of the Renters Rights Bill and advocate for a licensing scheme across the private rented sector and additional licensing for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

Priority actions

Continue to deliver improvements in energy efficiency particularly focusing on low-income households, vulnerable residents and those in fuel poverty in West Suffolk, ensuring officer capacity to support this work.

Work in partnership with landlords and property agents and through the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership and make best use of available data to ensure that the private rented sector properties are energy efficient, extending the current Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards project.

Ensure all new housing is built in line with the local plan requirements. The emerging local plan includes a policy which seeks to address climate change through sustainable design and construction with a fabric first approach to achieve carbon standards for all new homes.

Empty homes

Homes can be empty for a variety of reasons such as second homes and holiday lets but if they are left empty for a long time it can mean the property falls into disrepair, can attract squatters and antisocial behaviour. Tackling empty properties is also a sustainable way of increasing the overall supply of housing. Across West Suffolk there are around 300 long term empty properties, or properties that have been empty for over one year, and in 2024 the Council Tax premium for empty homes will be introduced to address this problem.

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)

Effective and integrated housing and health responses require a partnership approach to deliver the right kind of housing provision including housing for older people and housing that supports people with learning and physical disabilities.

West Suffolk Council grants aid necessary and appropriate works to adapt accommodation to allow disabled persons to remain in their own homes through the Disabled Facilities Grants (government funding allocated through Suffolk County Council’s Better Care Fund).

One of the key areas to continue to explore is how to support older people to return to their homes and provides practical assistance to reduce the likelihood of falls by, for example removing hazards or installing adaptations in the home to prevent hospital admission.

Safe communities

The quality of the local environment is also important to our residents and it is a key driver to what makes people feel happy, safe and secure. We ensure that individuals and communities are properly protected from environmental impacts such as noise, odour or smoke and will take a targeted approach to investigating complaints of nuisance, which can have an adverse impact on quality of life.

Mobile homes

The council is responsible for the regulation of licensed mobile home sites used for habitation, the main provision being by means of licensing to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the occupants.

Priority action

Review long term empty homes position in 2025 after promoting Council Tax changes and explore opportunities to work with other local authorities and partners to develop a wider response to empty homes, including looking at different funding options.

Priority action

To continue to support the Suffolk wide disabled facilities grants process and influence ways to better use data to support essential adaptations for those who need it.



Priority three

New homes; affordable, sustainable and accessible

The local context

We are keen to explore the role that increasing the supply of the right types of homes will have in ensuring more people have access to the homes they need to thrive. We recognise that this echoes the direction of travel for the current government and with that brings opportunity. Equally this is complex and we will look at best practice and engage with our communities, partners and the market to better understand the scale at which we need to deliver, the conditions we need to create to best support needs and how we can align this with our ambitions for growth to maximise benefits for our communities. We want to empower more communities to take a proactive role in supporting housing delivery. Furthermore, we want to continue to develop our understanding on how we can best use our powers, resources and the council's housing company, Barley Homes to support delivery of the right homes in the right places as well as encourage the market and registered providers to pilot more new products which better meet the needs of communities.

Many of our actions are focused on further building intelligence to enable us to quickly move to delivery in the knowledge that we are positively changing outcomes for how people live their lives in West Suffolk.

We want to ensure that whilst we are creating an environment where we increase affordability by providing higher value jobs, equally we want to ensure that more of those who work in key services which support our communities such as health and public services as well as service sectors, have a home they can afford. We recognise the importance of working with our key employment sectors such as the Horse Racing Industry and advanced manufacturing to enable them to attract and sustain talent and the workforce to grow their industries as well as working with the United States Air Force to manage the unique dynamic that their presence brings to create mutual benefit for both our communities.

The following themes will be our key areas of focus and are included in our priority actions.

Working with partners to deliver housing schemes and regeneration plans

We want to minimise the time that applicants are on our housing register and when they are placed in new homes, we want to maximise their potential to be happy, independent and feel a part of their local community, with the potential to access what they need to thrive. We recognise that we only have part of a role to play in achieving this and therefore need to work with others. We want to put a formal partnership framework in place, which is based on best practice and will allow us to drive shared outcomes, based on a deeper understanding of the needs of local communities. We will use this to evaluate success as well as lessons learned from partnership work. This will inform our ongoing work with developers and place making activities through the planning process and activities needed to support allocations from our register to new and existing affordable properties.

Respond to local housing needs

West Suffolk has high levels of housing need and whilst we have exceeded the council's delivery target in recent years, there is still an unmet need for accessible and affordable homes.

The local plan will act as a proactive tool to ensure we secure more affordable homes, with new policies requiring developments to meet minimum room size and also accessible standards. This will enable homes to be fit for purpose for longer, minimising the need for adaptations, or moving to more suitable accommodation, as people grow older. All of our housing needs cannot be met through the local plan and therefore this housing strategy will have a role in exploring other options to help increase housing delivery, including affordable housing.

Government has consulted on the National Planning Framework that increased the numbers of home that most councils including West Suffolk need to deliver. We are an ambitious council, which in principle supports the delivery of additional homes provided and leads to better outcomes for local communities. We recognise the role of strategic, long-term planning and partnership working including with neighbouring councils in Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, and Norfolk needed to achieve delivery and the potential value that creating the conditions for new sustainable growth and housing might achieve in providing a sustainable and resilient future.

Priority action

Work in partnership with registered providers and partners to develop formal agreements to facilitate system working at the earliest possible stage when delivering new housing schemes, regeneration plans and management of existing housing stock.

Priority action

Engage with the community, partners and developers to explore the potential benefits and options for increasing supply of housing and sustainable growth, including along our key corridors.

Explore options to increase delivery of affordable housing

Currently most of the delivery of new affordable housing is achieved in partnership with registered providers, which sees registered providers leveraging in their own private finance and utilising Homes England grant. In addition to the existing and valued ways we supply new homes, we intend to explore best practice and develop a range of options to support the delivery of housing in West Suffolk and to increase supply for local communities that will make a significant contribution to meeting specifically identified types of housing needs. We will explore how the council can make the best use of its powers in the context of emerging government policies, maximising use of One Public Estate assets, as well as the role of the council's housing company Barley Homes might play to support direct delivery of more affordable homes.

Investigate a range of housing models to meet local needs

A property can be considered 'right' in terms of size, cost, design and any support that is provided alongside it. Providing the right property ensures residents can access homes that meets their needs. Having a well-designed efficient home, sensitive to its surroundings and can adapt to climate change are key components of a successful, sustainable home.

Having access to the right home can improve our health and wellbeing and therefore, our quality of life. It assists in recovery and independent living and can reduce non-essential delays in health-related rehabilitation at home. Residents are better able to live independently and maximise their own choices. Expensive care and residential placements might be reduced if more of the right homes were available. We acknowledge and encourage the support of our partners in ensuring developments are closely linked to local need.

In addition, there are different approaches and best practice, that would enable us to better meet the different and diverse housing needs of local communities. This could include self and custom build housing as well as working with partners and developers to explore new housing models designed to meet needs and prevent barriers to people accessing housing and remaining in their homes.

Priority action

To undertake a best practice evaluation which explores and identifies options for the Council to increase delivery of affordable housing which best meets our existing and future needs.

Priority action

To investigate and review the range of new and emerging housing models and how they could be implemented to maximise the types of housing delivered in West Suffolk to meet future housing need. For example, we will work with partners, communities and developers to take forward pilots on sites such as custom and self-build, community land trusts, modular housing and 'build to rent' schemes.



Planning policies in the local plan encourage 10 per cent of dwellings on large sites to be self or custom build where viability allows, through the provision of serviced plots. Using other best practice, we would like to understand how we can work with developers to use these opportunities to best meet needs.

We would also welcome opportunities to explore other housing models such as build to rent and rent to buy, and local pilot schemes with specialist providers to meet the growing needs of an ageing population and first time-buyers. This would be in addition to exploring mechanisms which will best support our communities, partners and developers to come forward with innovative proposals and pilots such as community land trusts.

Development of the brownfield register

West Suffolk encourages the redevelopment of brownfield sites by working with partners and developers to address the barriers and to identify further opportunities for development and conversion, where viable. We would like to build on the work we have undertaken in creating a brownfield register to developers and develop plans to bring these sites forward for delivery.

Supplementary plans

Our local plan has a number of high-level policies which aim to maximise development of sustainable and energy efficient homes. They are designed and configured to better meet needs of people throughout their lifetime and improve health outcomes for our communities as well as maximising the number of affordable housing units delivered on housing sites. We will develop supplementary policy to provide more guidelines for developers on how these outcomes can be best achieved. This will provide clarity and maximise our achievement of these outcomes in new development.

Community led development

We would like to increase our understanding of the appetite from local communities to take a more proactive role in delivering community led housing. There are a number of models and also the policy context which supports this. We want to work with communities to understand what role we can take in further empowering them.

Priority action

Develop the brownfield site register into an active implementation plan creating a pipeline of potential sites on which more housing could be developed.

Priority action

We will ensure that our policies are kept updated and relevant for example Affordable Housing Supplementary Plans that provide additional explanation and guidance to assist developers in delivering the Local Plan. Expanding on the types of affordable housing products and schemes available that can be delivered to maximise health and wellbeing through good design and place making with the appropriate individual support.

Priority action

We will proactively engage with rural parishes and communities to further understand demand for community led development such as rural exception sites and community land trusts and what they need to support them in bringing these models of housing forward.

7 Governance and monitoring progress



This strategy includes actions that have specific timescales. We know that during that time there will be changes to legislation, regulation and wider societal and economic impacts that will affect local residents and communities and bring change to how we work as a council. That is why we want to ensure this strategy and in particular the actions we take can respond to and adapt to these changes. Through our working practices and how we engage with residents and communities, we will adapt to different circumstances and demands and continue to play a key role in setting the direction of our work around housing, homelessness and rough sleeping across the organisation and with partners.

As set out in legislation, the homelessness reduction and rough sleeping elements of this strategy need to be reviewed and updated every five years.

We will use the following methods that are already embedded as the way we work as a council to ensure regular governance and monitoring:

- A formal annual review of progress against the strategy and action plan reported to Cabinet
- Ongoing conversations with the Portfolio Holder for Housing
- Quarterly key performance indicators reported to Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Members
- West Suffolk Council's Annual Report
- Accountability to partner organisations
- Feedback through customer satisfaction surveys
- Reporting to central Government and
- We will take a proactive, and ongoing, approach to engagement and consultation with residents and other interested parties.

Over the duration of the strategy we will continue the conversation with residents, partner organisations and stakeholders to understand local need and how we need to respond through our approach to delivering on our priorities.

Appendices



You can read more on this strategy at:

[West Suffolk Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy](#)

Appendix A

[West Suffolk Council Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan](#)

Appendix B

[West Suffolk Council Housing and Homelessness Data Pack](#)

Appendix C

[West Suffolk Council Homelessness Review](#)

Appendix D

[West Suffolk Council Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy – public and stakeholder consultation](#)

Appendix E

[West Suffolk Council Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy - Equality Analysis](#)

West Suffolk

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