



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Housing Strategy 2022-2027



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FOREWORD

As we introduce this new Housing Strategy 2022-27 at the point of recovery from the Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020, the value of a home and residential accommodation generally have possibly never before been more heightened, as places where we all sought refuge and safety in unprecedented times. As a result, never has there been a more pressing time for us to reconsider the way we live our lives and, more specifically where and how we live as we recover from the Covid19 Pandemic, and deal with the impacts of a global catastrophe that has left many urban communities in devastation and economic ruin. Our focus as a council is to ensure our economy rebounds and our current and future housing offer will play an important role in this recovery.

As part of our overall response, we will actively promote the city and the housing offer we have and need, with the aim of providing opportunity for everyone who lives here currently, along with those seeking a home in the city for work or family related reasons, or simply because they view the city as a great place to live. We want to offer a fantastic range of accommodation options that meet the aspirations of all people choosing to live in this great city.

As Cabinet Member for Housing, I will provide local leadership and look to influence and help wherever possible to create the best housing conditions for the city for the benefit of our residents and businesses, demonstrating our resilience by reinvigorating the market and returning to pre-Covid levels of new homes built. This strategy translates our Powering Up housing growth ambitions and commitments into action.

Housing is critical to all parts of our local economy and the wider regional North Staffordshire economic environment, and is also a significant contributor to health outcomes and the way we all live our lives. Working with and alongside our partners. I understand that if we get the housing offer right, and there is choice for everyone, then enhanced prosperity and growth will inevitably follow.

This strategy is the starting point to create these conditions that will help us all along the way as we bounce back, to recover and to 'Power-Up' our city to a level we enjoyed before the Pandemic hit. The strategy, and what will follow on and be delivered in short succession, will play a vital role in levelling up Stoke-on-Trent, a key component in the Government's priorities and place making agenda.

Our latest Housing Strategy outlines our plans to meet the changing needs of our residents over the next five years. We intend to build on our recent successes by having the necessary framework in place to improve our housing offer, expedite the delivery of high-quality places to live and attract further investment into the city. The strategy has been written in a way that breaks down our housing issues and opportunities into eight main objectives which fall within three main themes:

- Driving economic success and widening housing choice
- Increasing owner occupation
- Enabling independence

Housing is absolutely fundamental to the well-being and health of all our city's communities and people, and as we implement our Housing Strategy Action Plan we hope that the positive impacts will be felt by all our residents, partners, developers, landlords and registered providers alike.

Councillor Carl Edwards
Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment



1

A VISION FOR CHANGE

Stoke-on-Trent has its roots in strong communities that have been forged by its industrial history. The homes in which these communities live represent a key part of our identity. Our intention is to ensure that the city's housing offer supports our economic growth ambitions, providing residents and future residents with a safe place to live and one which surpasses aspirations.

Stoke-on-Trent is undergoing the most significant transformation in its economic fortunes in over 30 years. It was amongst the fastest growing local economies to come out of the last recession and it has continued to outperform large areas of the UK in terms of GVA growth, job creation and innovation.

Against the backdrop of a country emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, we have launched the "Powering Up Stoke-on-Trent" prospectus, which is an integral part of our recovery plan and has been developed to ensure these strong economic foundations are built upon. The prospectus captures our intention to drive economic development and prosperity by fostering high growth sectors and creating the highly skilled and well paid jobs that Stoke-on-Trent continues to need if we are to level up in the way that both we and the Government aspire to. Physical regeneration has been critical in building confidence and enhancing positive external perceptions of the city and will continue to be an important element of this process.

Our population is growing in parallel with our economy. We have responded positively to this growth in the delivery of the previous housing strategy which has facilitated positive changes to the housing stock of the city and its management. This Strategy will maintain the momentum that we have generated, but recognises that there remains work to be done. It reframes and resets our vision and ambitions to reflect the changing economic and social context and it provides a clear framework of our priorities and expectations. Delivering against these over the next five years, working in partnership to deliver, manage and improve housing in the city, will be critical in continuing to develop a housing offer that we can all be proud of and which meets the needs and expectations of all of our communities.

A key component of the vision is the role that housing can play in facilitating an improved sense of place emerging in parallel, harnessing and supporting economic targeting investment in strategically planned place making and regeneration activity. The medium to long term pipeline of housing development enables the city council to use high quality urban design, improved public realm and supporting infrastructure to strengthen existing communities. As well as hard infrastructure it is equally crucial to 'bake in' social investment and community development as an intrinsic element of the overall vision, giving new and existing residents the best possible opportunities, generating social value and capital wherever possible.

Purpose of the Strategy

These are exciting times for the City of Stoke-on-Trent and it is important that we continue to strategically plan, invest and intervene, where the market is naturally risk averse, to ensure that our housing offer and the supporting infrastructure matches our ambition. This will require us to support new tenures of housing which encourage our residents to invest in the city, as well as enabling more high quality housing which will be critical to retaining and attracting the workforce that we will need to live and work in Stoke-on-Trent.

It is equally important, however, to recognise that, whilst our achievements to date have undoubtedly contributed towards changing the perception of the city and brought economic growth, the effect has not been felt by every resident. There are still people who are currently not fully benefitting from the opportunities presented by a growing economy and whose quality of life falls short of the level that they have a right to expect. This is where our approach to assisting those in need must be able to respond to the complex range of issues faced by our most vulnerable households. For every such household the basic right to a home which is a safe, secure and healthy place in an appropriate community setting is absolutely integral.

The development of new homes and investment in the existing stock also offers the opportunity to reflect on important learnings from the events of the last two years. Every effort will be made to ensure that housing takes full account of opportunities to improve the wider health and well-being of occupants with links made with the vision of the Stoke-on-Trent Health and Wellbeing Board.

While the pandemic has created new and immediate challenges, it remains the case that many of the city's more deep-rooted housing issues require continued attention and ever more innovative approaches to enable change and improvement. Similarly, in the provision of homes for this and future generations, this strategy responds to a global call to ensure that our actions are made with a full understanding of their potential to leave a positive environmental legacy. This Strategy will work to ensure that the development of each new house in the city, as well as investment in the improvement of our own stock, will contribute towards the goal of achieving net zero carbon by 2050.

Our residents deserve the best possible housing offer and this requires an ambitious and wide-reaching Strategy. This Strategy will support the council as it fulfils its strategic housing role, including the facilitation and influencing of new housing delivery to meet the needs of residents and support the city's economic growth, place making and community development objectives. It will also contribute towards the successful delivery of our Strategic Plan, "Stronger Together", and play an important role in realising the potential outlined in "Powering Up Stoke-on-Trent".

Importantly, this Strategy will also provide the framework and direction required to discharge a number of statutory duties, including:

- Addressing homelessness and the duty to hold a Housing Register;
- The monitoring and enforcement of private sector housing conditions; and
- The distribution of Disabled Facilities Grants.

Vision and Objectives

We have identified the three highest priority areas we need to address to deliver housing which matches the city's vision for growth and change.

Driving economic success and widening housing choice

Housing can play a key role in supporting the city's continued success by supplying the right type of house with the right tenure, for anyone with a requirement or desire to live and work in Stoke-on-Trent. In order to attract and retain the brightest and best we must increase the delivery of new high quality homes and improve the environment and communities within which they are located. Whilst our expectations around quality will apply to all new housing in the city, in order to address a longstanding gap in our housing offer, we will actively encourage the delivery and expand the choice available, of more aspirational and higher value housing. This will provide residents with a much greater variety of offer in order to satisfy their personal ambitions, this specific delivery of an aspirational housing product will sit alongside the overall pipeline envisaged to provide a much wider range of housing offer in a variety of settings, designed to suit all different income levels and circumstances.

The activity of continuing and accelerating the building of new housing and development itself, brings with it wider investment in the form of sustainable employment and new jobs to the city, with every £1 million spent on housing development estimated to secure/sustain around 20 jobs for a year and every 4 direct construction jobs creating another in the wider supply chain¹. Delivering new housing can also provide direct local economic benefits. Our local high streets have been particularly affected by the pandemic. We will support their recovery by generating new local spending power through the accommodation of residents in new housing on redundant and underutilised brownfield sites, promoting residential led alternative land uses in central locations, as part of a targeted programme of wider place making and regeneration activity. This positive economic impact as a direct result of brownfield remediation and redevelopment will build on the significant recent regeneration activity which has already taken place, and complement the delivery of new homes and the range of offer, across other parts of the city.





Increasing owner occupation

Stoke-on-Trent is recognised as an affordable place to live, with relatively low house prices, and is therefore an excellent choice for those relocating who want to maximise their disposable income or get more property for their money. The rate of home ownership in the city has been rising steadily, however it is still currently below the national average². The council will ensure that there are stepping stones to home ownership accessible for existing and new residents of the city. To deliver this objective, we will lead by example in the delivery of new affordable housing products and work with partners who can provide a greater breadth of opportunities. The actions set out to encourage access and widen opportunities for owner occupation will be expected to deliver an accelerated increase in the proportion of the city's residents owning their own homes and ensure that as many residents as possible have the ability to invest in the city themselves, plan their long term future here and then reap the rewards of its continued success.

Enabling independence

Projections suggest that the city's population is set to continue to age. The council's aim is for its residents to be as independent as possible for as long as possible, with an appropriate number and typology of housing being made available in the city and specifically targeted towards this goal. Progress towards this ambition has already started, through the replacement of some obsolete housing designated for older people with excellent new accommodation in a community orientated environment, that fully meets the changing needs of our older residents. Supporting long term independence is an underlying philosophy for all of the priority areas of intervention set out in this Strategy, applicable to not only our older population but also our more vulnerable households, including those living with long-term disabilities. The concept of Lifetime Homes must apply to the construction of an increasing number of new homes built to adapt to changing needs as well as the investment made in the adaptation of existing stock.

2

SETTING THE SCENE: Policy Context



STRONGER TOGETHER

Working together to create a stronger city we can all be proud of



“Stronger Together” is our Strategic Plan. It sets out the strategic vision and priorities for the council and the city as a whole.

The Plan outlines a comprehensive vision which aims to enable the city and its residents to achieve their full potential, through a series of defined priorities:

- Support vulnerable people in our communities to live their lives well;
- Enable our residents to fulfil their potential;
- Help businesses to thrive and make our city more prosperous;
- Work with our communities to make them healthier, safer and more sustainable; and
- Be an innovative and commercial council, providing effective leadership to help transform outcomes.

These priorities are reflected within the objectives of this Strategy, which is also aligned with the council’s supporting Operating Plan (2021-22) that acts as a roadmap to measure success in achieving the city council’s strategic aims. This Strategy will also be used to inform and direct future iterations of the Operating Plan over its lifetime.

The national policy agenda

Our Operating Plan responds to a requirement of the Government to make the most of new national initiatives aimed at addressing an acknowledged housing crisis.

In this context, the Government continues to develop its policy agenda so that it can use available levers to both encourage the supply of new housing and also offer the security and quality of homes that tenants and homeowners deserve.

This changing agenda includes:

- A commitment to reform the planning system to ensure it is more predictable in order to aid delivery and modernised to take account of a commitment to Net Zero Carbon and the environment³;
- The publication of a new charter for social housing residents⁴ in the form of a White Paper which contains various measures that are being actively explored by the Government over the coming years⁵;
- A commitment to improving building and fire safety⁶; and
- Progression of a Future Homes Standard, with a view to implementation in 2025⁷.
- The National Heat and Buildings Strategy⁸.

We will continue to respond to – and, where appropriate, look to influence – the Government’s national policy agenda as it evolves over the lifetime of this Strategy.



Our housing growth ambitions

We are committed to growing and improving the city's housing stock, and the Government likewise expects us – as one of the twenty largest cities and urban centres in England – to make an even greater contribution towards meeting housing needs, as expressed through its standard method of assessing such needs.

The Local Plan for the city is currently being drafted and will undergo further consultation prior to formal adoption and publication. It will review existing and propose new housing and employment allocations across Stoke-on-Trent to meet the needs of our residents and businesses. Whilst the emerging Local Plan will provide the statutory framework to support the delivery of new homes, this Strategy reinforces the council's commitment to being an enabler and facilitator of change, acting wherever necessary to lead by example to develop communities and deliver what residents need where the market acting alone is either unable or unwilling to invest.

Linkages with other city Strategies

This Strategy is an important strand of the council's plan to deliver "Stronger Together" and its success will be linked to and contribute towards its implementation.

Delivery of the actions set out in this Strategy will also, in turn, be supported by a number of further strategies which are signposted throughout, and include but are not limited to:

- Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2021 – 2026
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 – 2025
- Stoke-on-Trent Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021 – 2025
- Living My Best Life – Learning Disability Strategy – 2021 - 2026

We will be proactive in updating and creating strategies that address the areas of focus outlined in this new Strategy. We are committed to revisiting and developing these as necessary to direct and channel resources and provide clarity for other stakeholders supporting the council.

The council has a considerable stock holding in the city and its draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30 Year Business Plan and Asset Management Strategy 2022-27 set out our priorities in managing and maintaining our homes and other assets as well as our approach to ensuring efficient and effective investment.



Delivering change

We are committed to leading change in partnership. Over 100 organisations from the public, community and private sectors are represented in the recently established Stoke-on-Trent City Forum, which aims to deliver our ambitions by attracting investment. While its remit is broad, it provides the opportunity to elevate and communicate our housing led place-making priorities, and the outcomes of this Strategy. We will actively using the Forum to ensure that the housing agenda is given the attention it demands and the opportunities to forge further delivery partnerships taken.

Delivery of this Strategy will require outside investment, but we also have a significant asset base to enable us to directly invest within the city. The Housing Revenue Account⁹ Asset Management Strategy (HRAAMS) establishes our financial commitments to implement priority investments across our council housing portfolio, and as this is being refreshed alongside this Housing Strategy, we have sought to reflect its direction of travel in this document.

We also approved our new Asset Management Plan in June 2021, establishing the direction of planned investment across the other parts of the council's property portfolio. The Asset Management Plan revolves around three key themes, one of which – place-based working or locality working – has a wider impact on the delivery of services including those that relate to housing management in our communities. The opportunity this restructuring presents is recognised in the appropriate objectives set out within this Strategy.

Finally, a key legacy of the previous Housing Strategy has been the successful establishment and continued development of arms-length bodies, in the form of Fortior Homes and Unitas, which respectively have responsibility for delivering new homes and maintaining council-owned stock. Both organisations have proven to be successful against their objectives. It will be a priority for the council to ensure that these bodies continue to operate to their maximum potential.

3

SETTING THE SCENE: Understanding The Housing Market

256,620



people live in Stoke-on-Trent
growing by **4%** over the past decade¹⁰



Nearly

122,000

 jobs

based in Stoke-on-Trent as of 2019, rising by an average of **2,070** jobs per annum in the previous five years¹⁵. Particularly strong job growth in

health, logistics, IT and construction sectors

with **public services, wholesale and retail** also remaining prominent¹⁶



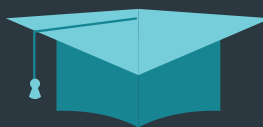
Earnings for full-time workers that have risen by
more than a fifth over the last five years to circa

£28,147

while continuing to lag behind the regional and national averages¹⁷

Home to Staffordshire University with

15,675

 students

and a further **10,880** students at Keele University¹⁴



A recently unprecedented

1,008

new homes completed in 2018/19,
19% more than in any other year since at least 2000,
with a further **917 homes** completed in the following year,
almost entirely on brownfield land¹¹

The average home sold for circa

£138,650 less than half the national average but up
23% compared to five years ago.

Newly built homes also shown to achieve values that were some **75%** higher on
average at around **£242,290**¹²

House prices equivalent to little more than **4 years earnings**
of local workers with both growing at a similar rate over the past five years

Stoke-on-Trent is the **9th** **most affordable authority**
area in England¹³

Some **12,345** residents claiming unemployment benefits as of May 2021,
equivalent to around **10%** of all economically active adults. This stood at around
6% prior to the pandemic, higher than regionally (5%) or nationally (4%) at that point¹⁹

£ 14th **most deprived local authority in England** (out of 326)
30% of residents living in neighbourhoods classified within the
10% most deprived nationwide¹⁸

Around

1,960 households in priority need on the Housing Register as of March 2021

4

STEPPING INTO HOME OWNERSHIP

Our objective

To assist residents in making their first steps towards home ownership where this is their aspiration.

What we've achieved to date:

- 2014 launch of what became known as the £1 home scheme in which all of the properties swiftly sold and a number of the first families are now stepping up into larger properties.
- Introduction of a successor programme to the £1 home scheme - the 'Reviving Communities' scheme.
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council were successful with their bid to Homes England to deliver four First Homes which will assist local first time buyers onto the housing ladder by offering new homes at a 30% discount.

Why we want to assist residents to step into home ownership

The Government is committed to supporting people that want to own a home to do so²⁰ and in support of this aspiration, introduced requirements for the delivery of First Homes through Section 106 contributions²¹ and proposed the introduction of a new shared ownership model, expecting half of homes delivered through the Affordable Homes Programme to be affordable home ownership products. It has also announced a Right to Shared Ownership, which will mean that most new grant-funded housing association homes for rent will give residents the opportunity to purchase a stake of at least 10% in the home and expand this in future.

The home ownership rate in Stoke-on-Trent has been consistently below the national average. In order to address this disparity, and in the context of the national commitment, we intend to provide our residents with a realistic and achievable opportunity to step into home ownership.

We recognise that this objective must respond to our city's distinct socio-economic and housing market profile. For many years, Stoke-on-Trent has been defined as, and indeed benefitted from, being a relatively affordable city to live in, with house prices and incomes below the national average. Whilst this affordability has proven an attractive pull for residents looking to obtain greater value for money, those on lower incomes have unfortunately been excluded from the home ownership market where the jump from other tenures has not been adequately bridged by the housing historically on offer, or that the housing on offer has not been of a good enough quality to encourage first time buyers to make the investment.

The absence of such housing choices is itself another consequence of the relative affordability and availability of lower value housing, which has to date prevented the private sector from exploring

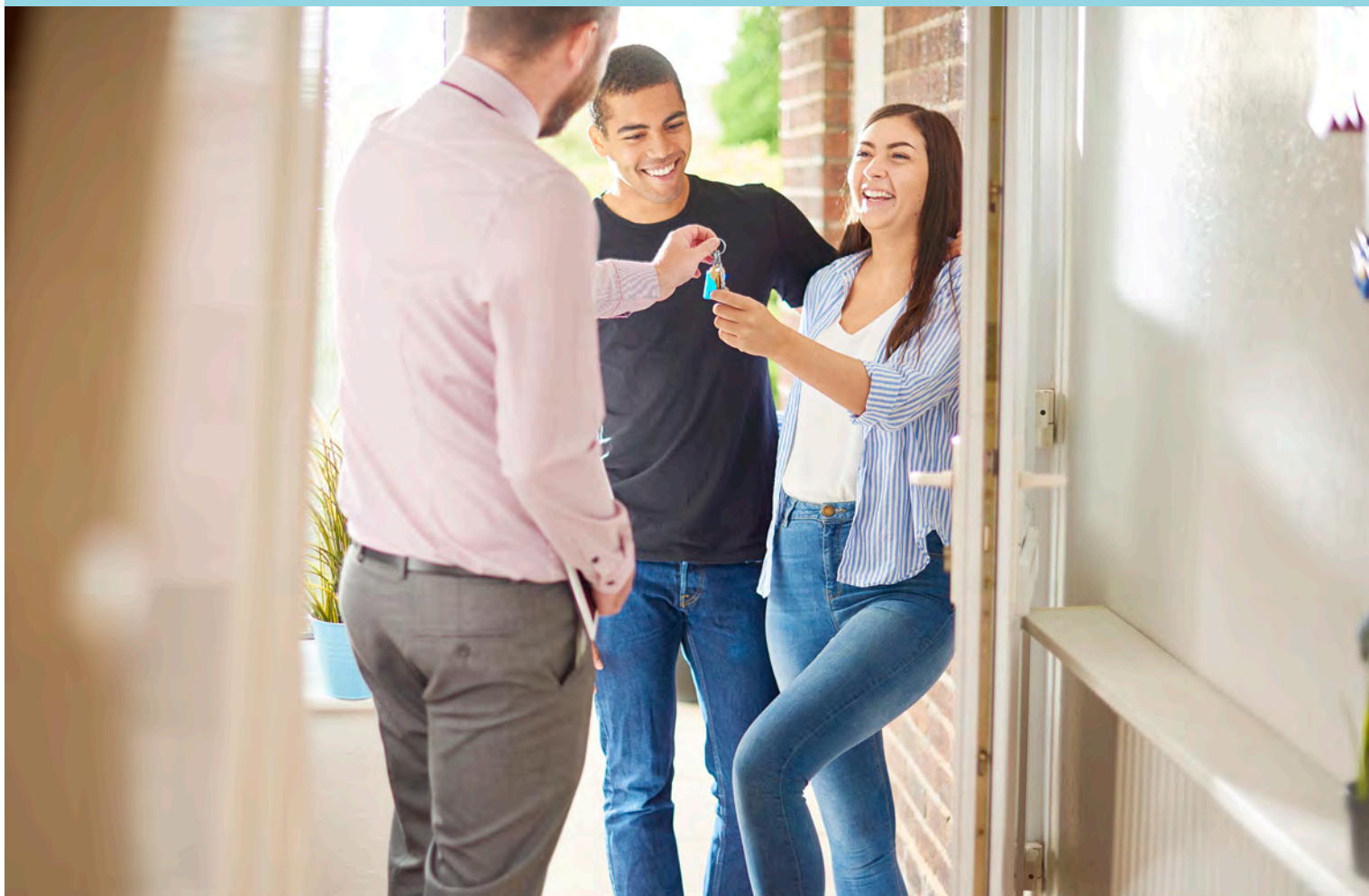
the provision of new alternative and higher quality lower cost housing options. This includes shared ownership schemes, with an average of only 11 such homes being built or acquired annually in Stoke-on-Trent²². Delivery partners suggest that this is linked to viability, and the competing offer of low cost market housing that can be wholly purchased, albeit some have managed to develop workable models that have driven sales on site and proven attractive to customers.

Actions

We will work with our providers and our communities to understand and tackle the challenges associated with providing relatively affordable yet high quality home ownership products, recognising the growing breadth of such products and the availability of new funding mechanisms to support this aspiration. This will be critical if we are to retain our households within the city as their aspirations evolve, and our growing economy and improved earning potential, provides them with the ability to exercise greater choice.

We will:

- Ensure that residents who live in social housing managed by the council are informed of the options they have to purchase their own home within the city.
- Work in partnership with Registered Providers and housebuilders to understand their product offer and provide complementary evidence of need to enhance their ability to viably deliver low cost home ownership products in Stoke-on-Trent.
- Establish, through the Local Plan, a supportive planning context to enable, wherever appropriate, the delivery of a range of housing tenures which will help residents step into home ownership and also meet every growing aspirations and associated expectations.



5

DELIVERING A WIDER RANGE OF QUALITY HOUSING FOR OWNER OCCUPIERS

Our objective

To require all new housing to contribute to noticeably raising the quality of housing in the city and to encourage and enable the delivery of larger and higher-value homes to address a longstanding gap in our housing offer.

What we've achieved to date:

- Clayworks, a pioneering Build to Rent scheme, offering 277 quality apartments as part of the emerging Smithfield district, being delivered by Genr8 in partnership with the council. The first phase was completed towards the end of 2020, during the pandemic, but is already 97% occupied with the vast majority of viewings leading to lettings.
- Saxon Place, where we are working in partnership with Novus Property Solutions to provide 128 quality one and two bedroom apartments and 43 two and three bedroom homes for private rent and sale.

Why we want to enable the delivery of a wider range of quality housing for owner occupiers

The city has made significant strides in increasing the rate at which new houses are delivered. This shows the current buoyancy of our housing market and reflects the strong demand evidenced from the growing number of people wanting to invest in owning their own property and making the city their home.

Encouragingly, the strengthening of the local housing market has been reflected in our ability to attract the larger national housebuilders²³ – as well as local and regional builders – to deliver larger family and executive style homes, in areas like Trentham, in greater numbers than have been seen for many years. We have also seen new high-quality Build to Rent apartments in the city centre for the first time, demonstrating a strong level of confidence from new investors in Stoke-on-Trent and a corresponding demand from the rental market. The provision of this accommodation being a step change from the historic private rented sector offer in terms of both quality of accommodation and affluence of tenant.

This investment and growth in this sector is being complemented through improvements in the city's fabric and wider offer, with this growth being sustained, one such example being through the recent award of £56m of Levelling Up monies to accelerate the redevelopment of our city centre and town centres (with said schemes being designed to provide a significant element of build to rent style high quality residential accommodation).

It is apparent from the soft market testing we have undertaken that the investments made by ourselves and others have greatly increased confidence in the city's housing market, and proven that there is a growing demand for high quality and larger housing



which if delivered intelligently can help to create stronger and more attractive neighbourhoods and communities.

While we can point to individual housing developments that have raised the bar in their design and sustainability credentials, including those which have delivered these larger and higher value properties, it is undoubtedly the case that if we are to rebalance the housing offer in the city we will need to see the delivery of much greater numbers of such specific property types as part of any new housing developments be them of a larger mixed tenure nature or smaller mews type developments.

Continuing to make progress in addressing deep-rooted gaps in the current housing offer and ensuring a consistent expectation around the quality of new homes which accords with emerging environmental and build quality standards²⁴, together with national space standard²⁵, is integral to:

- Achieving the ambition captured in the 'Powering Up Stoke-on-Trent' and 'Silicon Stoke' prospectuses to attract new national and international businesses to create higher value forms of employment; and
- Capturing the associated benefits by attracting and retaining the brightest and best to settle and live in the city throughout their career. This requires us to provide a high quality and evolving housing offer in an attractive setting, which meets their aspirations and requirements (in terms of quality, size and location) as they progress in their careers and put down family roots.

Continuing to attract and compete for investment will require us to demonstrate the unique ability of Stoke-on-Trent, when compared to more rural surrounding areas, to achieve complete, compact and connected neighbourhoods ('the 20 Minute Neighbourhood'²⁶) and the associated benefits this can bring for residents in terms of accessibility to goods and services in a nurturing community setting, and, more widely, in tackling the threat of climate change.

Actions

We remain committed to acting both independently and in partnership to ensure that high quality and innovative housing of all sizes and types is delivered across the city. We recognise that viability remains a critical factor when developers consider whether to invest in the city and we will continue to work with potential partners to explore innovative options to help spread and offset development risks, and continue to seek new funding opportunities through Government and partners to support the delivery of new homes.



We will:

- Challenge developers already active in our city and new entrants to provide larger high-quality housing products in suitable, desirable and sustainable locations. We will specifically provide support to encourage small and medium sized housebuilders based locally to grow their proportionate share of such housing delivery activity.
- Endeavour to unlock opportunity sites in the most attractive localities which will lend themselves to relatively small-scale but very high quality developments targeted specifically at providing high value homes to meet the growing demand of residents benefitting from the growing number of higher value jobs available in the city and within a reasonable commute and thus reducing migration.
- Expect new-build homes, wherever possible, to take into account best practice with regards building standards and energy efficiency in pursuit of Net Zero carbon and provide support in advising how this can be achieved, such as connection to the council Low Carbon District Heat Network.
- Support Fortior Homes and ensure that it has an active role in delivering housing schemes which continue to raise the bar and aspire in terms of quality and innovation, acting as a pioneer where necessary in different parts of the city or in the successful and sustainable delivery of specific housing products not currently being provided by the market. This will require the agreement of a pipeline of future development activity to be captured in a new business plan.
- Support the progression of the emerging Local Plan and its identification of an appropriate range of housing land. Prior to the adoption of the Local Plan, we will produce a fresh housing delivery plan, which identifies a pipeline of major brownfield opportunities (and a range of other smaller opportunity sites across the city in attractive locations suited to residential development) that offers choice for housebuilders of different sizes. This will be updated as required to account for the progression of the Local Plan and any new site allocations.
- Maintain and build the relationship with Homes England to focus on delivering significant housing growth on key brownfield sites, which include the provision of higher quality housing.
- Offer an exceptional and responsive planning service which provides developers with a greater level of certainty and assists in speeding up the planning application process.
- Consider the development of green field and green belt developments on a site by site basis to enable the provision of higher value homes in more desirable areas of the city, to meet the demand and aspiration of residents.

6

ENCOURAGING CUSTOM AND SELF-BUILD HOUSING

Our objective

To support existing and would-be residents of Stoke-on-Trent to either build their own home (self-build) or to commission the construction of a custom-built property if they want to.

Why we need to support the delivery of custom and self-build housing

Self-build and custom housebuilding have formed an integral part of the Government's agenda to increase the supply of new housing, leading to the introduction of new legislation²⁷.

“Custom build” as a term tends to be used where the future owner occupier of the home works with a specialist developer to build the dwelling. This is distinct from “self-build”, where the self-builder chooses a design and then does much of the actual construction work themselves; or the self-builder acquires a plot, organises a slab, buys a kit house, and puts the house together themselves.

In order to comply with legislation, the council is required to maintain a register of interest from individuals and groups for self-build and custom build. Our register shows that 193 individuals or groups had registered their interest as of April 2021, demonstrating an unmet demand for such homes and the potential to increase the currently small number of permissions granted²⁸. It is of note that almost 80% of those on the register have aspirations to build larger family housing with three bedrooms or more and just over 50% want to build a detached property.

In Stoke-on-Trent, enabling the provision of such housing offers the opportunity to positively contribute to the rich tapestry of our housing stock, allowing new technologies to be demonstrated and innovative designs to set new standards in energy efficiency, for example, as well as creating the bespoke homes that meet the needs of those households they are designed for. This aligns with our aspiration to support the provision of a higher quality housing offer and to create new and innovative places and neighbourhoods within which communities can thrive.



Actions

The existence of small-scale brownfield development sites across the city, often with comparatively low land values, in very accessible locations connected to the city's transport and social infrastructure offers an opportunity to enable an increase in new self-build and custom-building housing. Where the register demonstrates a demand for such housing, we need to better publicise the fact that we are “open for business” and supportive of this type of housing where it can contribute to our goal of elevating the quality of our housing offer and make the process for potential builders in the city more straightforward.

We will:

- Be proactive in reaching out to those who have expressed an interest in building their own homes individually or collectively and engage them in the development of a suite of supporting information and a supportive local policy framework to accelerate the build out of homes and to maintain momentum and interest.
- Use the emerging Local Plan and the informing assessment of potential housing supply to identify a pipeline of development plots in a range of settings, which are capable of responding to the differing needs of those registering their interest and are in-keeping with the scale and style of the varying self-build proposals.
- Actively encourage landowners, developers and registered providers to consider sites for targeted self and custom build projects as part of the work already done to engage with the sector.
- Share best practice and demand trends with our partners to demonstrate the increasingly successful deliverability of self and custom build projects.



7

GETTING THE STUDENT HOUSING OFFER RIGHT

Our objective

To ensure that students' experiences of higher and further education in Stoke-on-Trent are positively influenced by the choice of housing that is available.

What we've achieved to date:

- Approved and seen the completion of just over 360 new student bed spaces since 2015 in the city

Why we need to get the student housing offer right

Stoke-on-Trent is home to Staffordshire University, which has recently consolidated, and Keele University sits just outside our city in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Around 26,555 students are enrolled across the two universities, continuing to be one of the lowest combined totals since the turn of the century as observed in our evidence of housing need²⁹. We understand, however, that the two universities retain ambitions to increase student numbers.

Staffordshire University approved an £80m investment for a new campus masterplan, which – though paused as a result of the pandemic – is understood to reflect its intention to see a return to increased student numbers. Whilst this investment will take time to make an impact, it is understood that the University expects the Government's sustained focus on apprenticeships and vocational courses will at least maintain student numbers over the short-medium term. Separately, the council understands that, whilst Keele University retains an ambition to reach 20,000 students, this represents a long-term (40 year) vision and as part of these plans the University intends to grow its student accommodation offer within its own land holdings.

The housing offer to students needs to be responsive to the investment plans of the universities, where demand is highly susceptible to the quantum and nature of courses on offer, and we also understand that a relatively large proportion of students at both universities choose to live at home or in accommodation which is not purpose-built student housing.



Our housing evidence suggests, on the basis of current and forecast student numbers, there is unlikely to be a substantial need for new accommodation beyond that already in the pipeline³⁰. It does, however, highlight whilst additional demand arising from changing student numbers may be modest, this does not negate the fact that new supply can still be important in elevating the quality of our offer as well as offering the opportunity to reduce pressure on the private housing market.

We also recognise in this context that the importance of accommodating and retaining students extends beyond the time they are studying. Their retention as graduates is critical to addressing the current economic productivity gap in the city³¹. A highly skilled workforce attuned to the evolving economy is a prerequisite to attracting new business investment, and a student's experience of studying and living in Stoke-on-Trent (embracing the city and all it has to offer) is also influential to retaining them as residents of the city. This further emphasises the importance we will place on ensuring that the quality of accommodation not only matches students' aspirations but also provides flexibility where appropriate to potentially provide graduates with housing options that offer a comparable quality of living as they progress into employment.

Actions

Subject to the universities' views on the demand arising from their students, we will remain open to new student housing provision where it can contribute to improving the quality of our offer. We will encourage schemes to be designed to respond to changing market demand pressures and a wider breadth of student (including postgraduates) or indeed young households to ensure that new additions have the ability to pivot towards accommodating more general housing demand.

We will:

- Continue to work with the two universities to understand their student projections and jointly consider what this means for the demand for purpose- built student accommodation in the city.
- Ensure that we have an up-to-date understanding of the need for future student housing through regular updates to our Housing Needs Assessment.
- Provide a clear policy framework, through the development of the Local Plan, which is responsive to changing need and demand and the current available supply of student housing.





A COUNCIL HOUSING OFFER WHICH MEETS THE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS

Our objective

To raise the standard of the council's housing offer and the sense of place, to ensure that it meets the aspirations of our residents and communities, responding to their changing needs.

What we've achieved to date:

- The development of the Queen Elizabeth II supported housing in Fenton has demonstrated what we can achieve in providing new housing which meets the needs of our older residents.
- Published a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which sets out how we will work with our partners across all sectors to develop an integrated approach to prevent and relieve homelessness for a wide range of people affected in the city.
- Secured over £2m of Government funding over the last two years to help tackle rough sleeping, reflecting the confidence the Government has in the strength of partnerships in the city to deliver against this agenda.
- In 2020/21 the Housing Solutions Team dealt with over 2,500 homeless enquiries resulting in a successful outcome in 78% of cases closed, the 15th highest out of 317 councils in the country.
- In 2016, we set up a new company called Unitas, which is wholly owned by the council and has responsibility for maintaining our c18,000 council houses as well as 600 non-housing council buildings. The company was formally launched in 2018 with just under 500 staff, and by 2020 it made the UK Housing Awards shortlist in recognition of its performance and contribution to the city.

Why we need to ensure the council's housing offer meets the needs of the city's residents

The council is a stock holding authority and maintains close to 18,000 residential housing units across the city. This includes houses; low, medium and high rise flats; bungalows; and sheltered housing schemes.

Council housing represents one of our major assets. Managing and maintaining the stock and our neighbourhoods to a good standard and, importantly, investing in its long term sustainability, contributes markedly to the provision of appropriate, high quality affordable homes for people of all ages and at all stages of life. It is widely recognised housing condition is a key factor influencing individual health and wellbeing, the ability to live safely and independently and individual life chances, as they relate to educational attainment and employment for instance.



The supply of good quality council housing in an attractive locality also helps us to fulfil our obligations in relation to addressing housing need and preventing homelessness.

The council's stock has been reducing as a result of tenants exercising their Right to Buy and without the provision of new homes the supply will be further reduced. Our housing evidence³² identified a future need for more affordable homes. This need was heavily oriented towards one bedroom properties, with a potential surplus of two bedroom homes identified and a lesser, but still significant, need for larger family homes with at least three bedrooms. This reinforces the importance of ensuring that where new homes are re-provided they are oriented towards changing needs.

The Government has set a target to eradicate homelessness by the next Parliament. We undertook a comprehensive review of the current and likely future state of homelessness within Stoke-on-Trent in 2019. This highlighted and reinforced the complexities associated with homelessness in terms of the associated risks, the range of health and social needs of those experiencing homelessness, the challenges presented by worsening housing affordability related to economic vulnerabilities and changes to the benefits system. All of these factors, it is acknowledged, combine to make it increasingly difficult for local authorities to support people, albeit this is a challenge we must meet.

The pandemic reinforced the importance of ensuring that every resident has the ability to access a home of their own to live in. Solutions were found out of necessity to ensure that those individuals displaced from the housing market were found temporary accommodation. In order to build from the positive impact of these actions, and as part of our recovery plan from the pandemic, we will need to increase the provision of move-on accommodation to maintain our progress in reducing homelessness.

Supporting younger households, in particular from within the care system, also represents a key preventative measure with regards future homelessness, and this will continue to represent an important area of focus for this Strategy to be taken forward in partnership with our young people services.

Our housing evidence has affirmed the city's population is forecast to age, and the same will be true of people living in our stock. We are continuing to implement the recommendations of the Sheltered Housing Review approved in 2018 which will see the replacement of the majority of the council's existing sheltered housing schemes with new sheltered provision. The new homes being provided will ensure households are able to live independently for as long as possible and meet their needs thereafter. The availability of new improved stock which meets the needs of our older populations, in locations close to local amenities and with a strong community support network, will also offer the direct benefit of freeing up in demand family stock. This will be supported by the council's downsizing incentives scheme which is intended to support tenants to downsize by at least two bedrooms where they are under-occupying their home. In implementing this scheme and in considering the future location of new appropriate housing we recognise the importance of seeking to enable residents to remain within their own localities, acknowledging the stress that the process of moving can create.

This Strategy also continues to recognise the needs of our other more vulnerable households, including those living with disabilities. Ensuring that existing housing is adapted or new housing built to enable their independence or alternatively where preferred a safe environment created in which they can be cared for by families remains a priority for the council, which will be enabled through the continued award of Disabled Facilities Grants and in its implementation of other related strategies³³.

It is also recognised from research undertaken in the Draft Domestic Abuse Strategy Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent 2021-2024 that it remains challenging to accommodate large families or those with complex housing histories (rent arrears or evictions) in more settled accommodation. Due to a lack of availability of larger properties, this is particularly also the case where families require houses with more than three bedrooms.

We will ensure appropriate support is provided as part of our service and incorporate the identified housing needs demand into future plans.

Finally, we recognise that out of necessity our day to day engagement with tenants has had to evolve through the pandemic. This has affirmed to us the importance of ensuring that we are able to listen to all of our tenants through effective engagement and that any issues they have around the repair and standards of their property are addressed efficiently and to a high standard.



Actions

We will implement our Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan which establishes the role that council housing has to play in achieving a balanced housing market. This specifically looks to ensure that we can manage and maintain our existing homes well; improve and update homes that do not meet current and future requirements; and provide new homes where there is a proven need.

We will build on the progress we have made, particularly through the pandemic, in engaging with and listening to our tenants. As we seek to improve our housing offer we are committed to the development of our Housing Customer Engagement Strategy, currently undergoing consultation. This will deliver a menu of choices to increase the involvement of our housing customers, ensuring that our decision making is well-informed.

We will:

- Reduce the number of void homes in our stock by proactively identifying and addressing the factors that make individual properties difficult to let.
- Focus on the provision of new accommodation for older people and smaller one-bedroom properties for which there is an evidenced need.
- Implement the downsizing incentives scheme.
- Refresh our Older People's Housing and Accommodation Strategy, taking account of the latest evidence of changing needs and household aspirations, to provide, in partnership with the private sector, a new supported housing offer which helps a range of vulnerable groups alongside older people.
- Work towards achieving the Government's objective of eradicating rough sleeping by 2024 by delivering the priorities and vision of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy including the development of a Homelessness Charter, setting out the commitment of the council other housing providers and business partners to work together to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness.
- Focus on providing move-on accommodation with appropriate support to build on positive steps taken during the pandemic, reinforcing the importance of growing the number of appropriately sized affordable homes through the replenishment of our stock and the provision of new stock by Registered Providers.
- Continue to support young people leaving care and other vulnerable young people to ensure their housing needs are met.
- Provide support with accommodation for large families and those with complex housing histories into settled accommodation, incorporating housing needs into future plans.





- Develop resident engagement in line with the findings and recommendations of the independent review of our housing landlord function, introducing our Housing Customer Engagement Strategy to provide a greater range of choices to enable resident involvement.
- Help our tenants to better access digital services and start the process of making our residents' homes digitally connected.
- Continue to support Unitas to increase the volume of repairs and maintenance works it undertakes whilst continuing to deliver high levels of customer service and value for money.
- Provide a single accessible reference point detailing the full range of options of support available from the council to assist with the adaptation of properties to better meet households' needs
- Ensure that the council's stock accords with future updates to Decent Homes Standard³⁴ and responses to the target of eradicating fuel poverty whilst taking a longer term view on the best approach to respond to the Government's Net Zero Carbon agenda which requires zero carbon housing stock by 2050.
- Respond to the recommendations of our Fuel Poverty Strategy, and revisit this strategy, accounting for the implications of the forthcoming Future Homes Standard, with regards required investment in our own stockholdings³⁵.

9

PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH REGISTERED PROVIDERS

Our objective

To increase the amount of housing owned and managed by Registered Providers in Stoke-on-Trent.

What we've achieved to date:

- The Council has nomination agreements with all major registered providers in the city and in 2020/21 made 264 nominations through this process
- Seen the delivery over the last 5 years of around 75 new properties providing a mixture of houses flats and bungalows by a range of providers including Stoke on Trent Housing Society, Your Housing and Staffs Housing.
- Delivered 3 large extra care facilities providing flexible, high quality accommodation with care for over 200 older people.

Why we need to work with Registered Providers to deliver more homes in the city

Stoke-on-Trent's housing profile is relatively unusual in that comparatively few of our homes, only 7%, are managed by Registered Providers, including housing associations. The result is that residents are more limited in the choices they can exercise where, if they are not able to access market housing, the majority of affordable homes available are managed by the council.

Enhanced levels of investment by Registered Providers in the city together with the more productive use of their current asset base, offers a further opportunity to increase the provision of homes we will need in the full range of affordable housing tenures and to meet the needs of different age groups.

In particular, Registered Providers – who in most cases have a regional and national coverage – tend to be able to offer a greater range of affordable products which we require to assist in our ambition to support residents into home ownership for example. We recognise, however, that the comparative viability of such products has historically proven a challenge in Stoke-on-Trent and we therefore need to understand, through the strengthening of relationships, how we can provide a supportive environment to assist.

Registered Providers have also expressed an interest in delivering housing directly aimed at our older age groups. We are keen, as per the previous section of this Strategy, to encourage the provision of such housing to complement our own stock where we recognise that this alone will fall short of meeting needs in full.

We are also aware that a number of Registered Providers are leading the way in demonstrating the benefits of delivering homes using modern methods of construction (MMC). The attraction of



such providers, noting that this includes a number not currently delivering homes in the city, offers an important opportunity to use innovative build solutions to create homes for future generations recognising that the council will be required to provide a minimum of 10% of its new affordable housing development programme using MMC³⁶.

Finally, the building of stronger relationships with Registered Providers provides the opportunity to ensure a consistent improvement in the standards of service, care and the quality of housing the residents of our city enjoy. Where the number of affordable homes managed by other providers increases this will take on increasing importance, particularly in the context of the reforms set out in the Government's Social Housing White Paper.

Actions

It is clear from the soft market testing we have undertaken to inform this Strategy that we need to work harder to promote the scale of the investment opportunity in Stoke-on-Trent. This recognises existing perceptions around deliverability and viability issues in the city. There is clear evidence our housing market is enjoying a resurgence, with this reflected in growing interest from Registered Providers to work with the council to deliver new homes in the city. In order to encourage Registered Providers to deliver quality homes in the areas of the city that need them, we will be flexible and proactive in our support, through delivery of grant funding and the packaging of council-owned land opportunities for example. Similarly, we will continue to explore the opportunity to enter into partnership arrangements with Registered Providers where this offers a mutually beneficial solution to ensure that higher quality homes can be provided more quickly.



We will:

- Build on the soft market testing undertaken to inform the development of this Strategy, to further our understanding of how individual Registered Providers operating in Stoke-on-Trent can maximise the potential of land and assets already within their control and also significantly increase their investment and general activity in the city. Encouraging them to be pathfinders helping others to become registered with the Regulator of Social Housing.
- Work to attract Registered Providers not currently managing or delivering homes in the city to invest and play a role in increasing the range of housing options, drawing on their experience of providing homes in other parts of the country. This will include discussions around site opportunities identified through our strategic site list.
- Work with Registered Providers who provide supported housing to increase their supply of such housing within the city, in order to support the independence of residents in social and affordable housing.
- Continue to identify and offer grant funding to support the development of new housing which meets the needs of the city and contributes to our regeneration priorities.
- Support Registered Providers who identify opportunities to deliver new housing using modern methods of construction, and meet the additional requirements of the upcoming Future Homes Standard.
- Support Registered Providers to deliver a quality of service to their tenants which matches the expectations of the Government and our own practices in the management of our stock.

10

A REFRESH OF OBSOLETE AFFORDABLE HOUSING STOCK

Our objective

To be visionary in addressing less well performing affordable housing stock, so called 'obsolete stock', which does not, or will not, satisfactorily meet the needs of tenants and is, therefore, unsustainable in the medium to longer-term.

Why we need to refresh obsolete affordable housing stock in the city

The Decent Homes Standard has been for many years a key driver in shaping programmes of investment in affordable housing stock. Looking forward the council is aware there are a range of wider considerations which form an important context for assessing the sustainability of this stock. This includes the importance of building and customer safety reflected in new emerging legislation³⁷ as well as the Government's target to achieve Net Zero carbon housing stock by 2050 and the proposed implementation of a Decent Homes Plus standard.

The council has sought to proactively plan for the consequences of these changes in the development of the HRAAMS, taking account of a survey of all of its housing stock. This has shown that there are particular typologies of housing within the council's ownership which have become obsolete, or will become so when judged against changing legislation and standards. Acknowledging the fundamental deficiencies in this stock whilst recognising the disruption for affected households will require difficult decisions to be made through the lifetime of this Strategy but also beyond. Failing to address issues of obsolescence will, however, have longer and more detrimental consequences for residents and their communities.

Where redevelopment is identified as an appropriate and viable option as opposed to re-investment, we will ensure in pursuing this that a mix of housing tenures is provided at densities which reflect the characteristics of each area and in no way diminishes the value of established communities. Indeed the aspiration being to improve and reinvigorate some of these communities by upgrading the quality of both the housing offer and the public realm, attracting new residents to these areas and giving existing residents a renewed sense of pride and value in their local environment. This will enable the existing residents of obsolete homes to be accommodated in the newly provided housing within the same locality (as may be appropriate), and will also lead to development that positively contributes to our wider ambitions to deliver a broader range of housing options that help people to step into home ownership and potentially put down roots i.e. investing in larger and/or higher quality homes and giving the option to downsize or seek readily available alternative types of accommodation when more appropriate to so, all located within the city and close to high quality community infrastructure.

We recognise that there may be Registered Providers active in the city, who through the development of stock condition surveys similarly identify issues of obsolescence in their affordable housing stock. Such stock will need to be prioritised for re-development or re-investment to ensure our residents are not living in sub-standard accommodation.



Actions

The HRAAMS identifies long-term sustainability issues with certain stock. This includes consideration through option appraisal as to the role of selective replacement of housing. The council will, in the context of our financial and housing responsibilities, act to further consider and implement the chosen options while ensuring that the choices available to residents are improved as a result of the replacement of any obsolete stock. Every opportunity will also be taken through these processes to provide additional benefits to the affected areas, bringing new employment opportunities and wider economic growth.

We will:

- Establish a new aspirational quality and safety-based standard for our property portfolio.
- Tackle, by way of investment, disinvestment, or divestment, those properties and neighbourhoods that are found to fall short of the council standard or exhibit other forms of obsolescence providing a road map for reinvestment and a new improved community to emerge.
- Support Registered Providers to ensure the re-investment or re-development of obsolete stock in their ownership.
- Concentrate resources in affected local communities to listen to residents and ensure they are at the heart of the decisions we make and are supported in meeting their housing needs through periods of transition.

11

IMPROVING THE CITY'S PRIVATE RENTED HOUSING STOCK

Our objective

To improve the physical condition and management of the private rented stock in the city to achieve a higher occupancy rate within the tenure and ensure that tenants are treated fairly and with respect.

What we've achieved to date:

- Since the publication of the last Empty Homes Strategy in 2014, the council's empty homes team has brought some 1,173 empty homes back into use, triggering over £12.5 million of private investment seeking to improve conditions.
- Published a new and updated Empty Homes Strategy which builds on the successes of the last five years and sets out a commitment to keep working to foster innovative approaches for dealing with empty homes.
- Around 500 landlords actively involved in the Landlord Accreditation Scheme for North Staffordshire, managed by the council in partnership with Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council.

Why we need to improve the city's private rented stock

The private rented sector currently accommodates around 17,500 households in the city³⁸. We really value the contribution made by good landlords. Most landlords provide well-maintained and quality accommodation for their tenants. However, a minority fail to do so, and this can put tenants' safety at risk. As a priority recognising the enhanced focus on building safety as referenced in section 2 of this Strategy the Private Sector Housing Team have worked with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to investigate the cladding of all privately-owned residential accommodation over 18m in height. All three blocks have been deemed as safe and no further action required from the owners.

Positively the Housing Needs Assessment identified that forecast growth in our economy, aside from generating demand for home ownership, will likely sustain and indeed grow demand for private rented homes. This was based on the income profile and tendency to rent privately within many of the sectors of the economy which are forecast to generate new employment opportunities. As set out earlier in the Strategy, the housing market is already responding to this growing need in the provision of new homes for private rent in the city centre through, for example, Build to Rent.

Whilst the delivery of new homes is an important priority for the council, they will ultimately represent only a small fraction of the overall stock, the better occupation of which is therefore a key consideration in meeting need.

Despite the demand for private rented housing, the city continues to have a relatively high number and proportion of empty homes, concentrated in particular within the private rented sector. Our latest Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey in 2017 found that 17% of private rented properties were vacant compared to around 5% within the owner occupied sector. It showed that the highest rates of vacancy were found in the pre-1919 and inter-war housing stock, these often being terraced houses or flats in converted or mixed use buildings.

Additional challenges arising from the pandemic have contributed to an increase in empty properties³⁹. These homes are a wasted resource, both for individual owners and the local community. Long-term empty homes can fall into a state of disrepair and have a negative social and environmental effect on our communities.

Whilst we have good responsible landlords, providing good quality, well managed accommodation, in some geographies, even where stock is occupied and provides a relatively affordable option for many residents, underinvestment combined with the age of many of the properties means they are disproportionately energy inefficient and therefore costly in terms of heating and maintenance. Stoke-on-Trent is ranked 2nd highest of 151 Local Authorities, with 21.8% of households in fuel poverty (West Midlands 17.5%, England 13.4%). Stoke-on-Trent is mentioned in the report as having one of the highest rates, along with three other West Midlands authorities and three London boroughs. The 2021 sub-regional fuel poverty estimates (using 2019 data) were recently published and have changed the main measure of fuel poverty to “LILEE” (Low Income Low Energy Efficiency), which gives a much higher percentage of fuel poverty in the city than the previous Low Income High Cost measure.

National statistics show the required fuel costs for residents living in the least efficient homes are three times higher than those costs for the most efficient properties. We have proactively addressed the issue through the provision of Safe and Warm Homes Grants for lower income households; providing Top-Up Grants for low income households who are eligible for Energy Company Obligation grants but are required to contribute and cannot afford that contribution. We have successfully delivered the Warm Homes Fund for first time central heating and will bid for further funding streams for first time central heating.





This grant has provided households living in cold homes with efficient means to heat their home. Along with this we have provided energy advice to help them maximise their income and afford their fuel bills. We have also been successful for Green Homes Grants through the Local Authority Delivery Scheme Phase 2 and Phase 3. This will see a further investment of £2.2m across poor efficiency private sector homes across the city. Despite these efforts more needs to be done by those landlords who neglect their property and subsequently their tenants. We will continue to support Landlords in their adherence to the requirement for all tenancies achieve a minimum energy rating of E on their Energy Performance Certificate by 2025. Encouraging and supporting these poor performing landlords to invest in their properties has direct benefits for tenants and in ensuring the longevity of housing whilst also contributing significantly to the wider Net Zero carbon agenda.

The council is also supporting tenants to maximise their benefits and consequently be able to afford their fuel bills through a two-year commission across the city. The Energy Advice Scheme is a free, independent service for all private sector residents (home owners and private tenants) in the city.

The organisation will give advice on paying for fuel; finding the best available tariffs; switching supplier; improving energy efficiency in the home; fuel debt; accessing funding available for heating repairs, and replacements; register households as priority customers with their energy provider and access the warm home discount of £140.00

The organisation will also help with signposting to funding available through the council's Safe and Warm Home grants and Government schemes such as the Energy Company Obligation Scheme (ECO) and the Green Homes Grant. Funding which is available to help with insulation and other energy efficiency measures.

It should be acknowledged that successfully delivering new and better-quality homes has potential consequences in further undermining the demand for poorer quality stock, where rents may be cheaper but associated maintenance and living costs are higher. Without a concerted effort to improve standards in both the management and conditions of the stock, there is a risk we will see an increasing number of homes that are not fit for purpose. This could have adverse consequences financially for the council where the number of empty homes directly impacts on New Homes Bonus payments and the importance of supporting this tenure must be considered alongside the prioritisation of other tenures.

We recognise the impact that poor landlords can have on the mental and physical well-being of their tenants and their families, the detrimental impact on the local neighbourhoods of poor-quality housing also poses a risk to the regeneration and place-making agenda. We have made important strides in positively engaging with and developing landlords through the Landlord Accreditation Scheme for North Staffordshire. The scheme works in partnership with some of the city's best landlords and calls upon them on occasion to help tenants who are facing problems, and the response is always positive and illustrates that the city has good responsible landlords providing accommodation to residents. It is recognised, however, there continue to be a small proportion of persistent problem landlords that are not adequately engaged and in some cases fall short of delivering the service that our residents expect and deserve.

Actions

Significant progress has been made under the previous Housing Strategy to address what were identified to be challenges in the city's private rented housing. This tenure has a particularly high turnover of tenants and landlords, and it is clear fundamental challenges remain in addressing persistently high numbers of empty private rental properties and the physical conditions of and the management of much of the older stock in this tenure across the city.

We will:

- Deliver the priorities and actions set out within the recently published Empty Homes Strategy to reduce the number of empty homes in the city. This will include proactively supporting owners to help them to return their properties back into use.
- Improve the condition and liveability of existing homes and rental management practices in Stoke-on-Trent by continuing to deliver against our Private Sector Enforcement Strategy and taking enforcement action against landlords operating illegally across the city and by supporting the Landlord Accreditation Scheme, looking at ways to increase its membership and reaching out to lesser performing landlords.
- Continue to improve the online presence of the empty homes team to achieve further efficiencies in registering and identifying problem properties.
- Take a more proactive approach to promoting funding available to private sector landlords to adapt properties and increase their accessibility to all households, helping to ensure that tenants can be retained as their circumstances change.
- Explore various marketing tools and innovative methods to promote the private sector housing services to those who are exploited by bad landlords.

REFERENCES

1. Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government quoted in SCC Strategic Housing Investment Plan report January 2020
2. ONS (2021) Subnational estimates of households by tenure, England. Circa 62% of households in Stoke-on-Trent were reported to be owner occupiers in 2019, compared to a national average of 66%
3. MHCLG (2020) Planning for the Future; <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/local-government-association-annual-conference-2021-secretary-of-states-speech>
4. MHCLG (2020) The charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper
5. For example, the Regulator of Social Housing plans to carry out stakeholder engagement and consultation on new tenant satisfaction measures throughout 2021-22, with a view to introducing them in 2023. It is also the case that some of the White Paper proposals will require primary legislation before they can be implemented. The Queen's speech 2021 did not include a Social Housing Bill. The background briefing notes (Social Housing Reform in England: What Next?; 19 May 2021) state that the Government will continue to deliver on the White Paper proposals and will 'look to legislate as soon as practicable'
6. The Draft Building Safety Bill introduced in the House of Commons on 5 July 2021 and the Fire Safety Act 2021
7. MHCLG (2021) The Future Homes Standard: 2019 Consultation on changes to Part L (conservation of fuel and power) and Part F (ventilation) of the Building Regulations for new dwellings: summary of responses received and Government response
8. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1036227/E02666137_CP_388_Heat_and_Buildings_Elay.pdf
9. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) records expenditure and income on running the council's own housing stock and closely related services or facilities. This differs from the Asset Management Plan (AMP) which sets out the council's strategy for managing its wider property portfolio to achieve its wider business objectives.
10. ONS (2021) Population estimates, mid-2020
11. City of Stoke-on-Trent Council (2021) Annual Monitoring Report & Local Development Scheme, Tables 2 and 4
12. ONS (2021) House price statistics for small areas in England and Wales: year ending December 2020, HPSSA datasets 12-14 (mean house prices)
13. ONS (2021) House price to workplace-based earnings ratio, Table 5c (median)
14. Higher Education Statistics Agency (2021) HE student enrolments by HE provider, 2019/20
15. ONS (2020) Business Register and Employment Survey, 2009-19
16. Turley (2020) Economic Needs Assessment: Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent, Table 4.2
17. ONS (2020) Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, workplace analysis
18. MHCLG (2019) English indices of deprivation 2019
19. ONS (2021) Claimant count by sex and age; January 2020 and May 2021
20. Expressed, for example, at paragraph 153 of the Charter for Social Housing Residents: the Social Housing White Paper (November 2020).
21. First Homes are the government's preferred discounted market tenure and should account for at least 25% of all affordable housing units delivered by developers through planning obligations (Planning Practice Guidance Reference ID: 70-001-20210524)
22. Based on MHCLG data introduced on p75 of the Turley (2020) Housing Needs Assessment: Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent.

23. Such as Barratt, Persimmon, Keepmoat, St Modwen and Lovell.
24. This will include the Future Homes Standard or equivalent on its adoption as well as other locally set standards to achieve our goal of working towards Net Zero by 2050 to be set within the Local Plan
25. Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
26. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/guide-the-20-minute-neighbourhood>
27. This includes the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act (March 2015), The Self-build and Custom Housebuilding (Register) Regulations 2016 (Commenced 1st April 2016), Housing and Planning Act 2016
28. MHCLG's Right to Build Register Monitoring identifies that only 23 permissions were granted for serviced plots suitable for self and custom build within the City between 31 October 2017 and 30 October 2019.
29. Higher Education Statistics Agency (2021) HE student enrolments by HE provider, 2019/20; Turley (2020) Housing Needs Assessment, paragraph 8.26
30. It observes that as of 2020 that there were a total of 200 additional student accommodation units in the pipeline with planning approval, under construction or still to commence in Stoke-on-Trent with applications for a further 600 units that are currently awaiting determination.
31. The importance of developing stronger links between the city's universities and its business base is identified within the early work informing the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Industrial Strategy (LIS).
32. Turley (2020) Housing Needs Assessment: Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent
33. This includes, for example, the 'Living My Best Life' – A Life Course Strategy for People with a Learning Disability in Stoke-on-Trent 2021 – 2026', NHS Stoke-on-Trent / equal people in Stoke-on-Trent / City of Stoke-on-Trent Council
34. The Government's definition of what is a decent home and is set out in "A Decent Home: Definition and Guidance for Implementation". It sets out that a decent home meets four criteria (a) it meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing (b) it is in a reasonable state of repair (c) it has reasonably modern facilities and services and (d) it provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.
35. The Council is committed to ensuring all its properties meet the minimum Energy Efficiency Standards recognising changing requirements of Energy Performance Certificates for all rental properties by 2025
36. This is required to meet Homes England grant funding criteria
37. Building Safety Bill and the Fire Safety Act for example
38. ONS (2021) Subnational estimates of households by tenure, England
39. As of October 2020 there were around 3,750 empty homes recorded, of which the majority (72%) had been empty for more than six months - MHCLG (2020) Council Taxbase in England

Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Housing Strategy

2022-2027

Appendix 1: Housing Strategy Action Plan

Appendix 2: Monitoring arrangements



Appendix 1: Housing Strategy Action Plan

Vision: For Growth and Change

3 High Priority Areas:

1. Driving Economic Success and Widening Housing Choice
2. Increasing Owner Occupation
3. Enabling Independence



1. Stepping into home Ownership

To assist residents in making their first steps towards home ownership where this is their aspiration.

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
1.1 Prepare literature setting out the tenure options available to tenants looking to purchase a home.	Literature is widely disseminated and existing social housing tenants are better informed as to the options available to assist them to move into home ownership where this is their aspirations.	There are a complex range of affordable home ownership products and their definition and applicability is subject to change. Materials should be web-based in the first instance to allow them to be regularly updated. The subject material is complex and technical and will need to be clearly articulated / presented to ensure it is accessible.	Enabling and Projects Team / Housing Management / Housing Development	Short-Medium term.
1.2 Survey of Registered Providers / Housebuilders with or developing properties in Stoke-on-Trent to audit the current product offer.	Comprehensive documentation of all affordable housing stock in the city. This will ensure a full understanding of the different affordable home ownership products being used / advertised in Stoke-on-Trent and which are available to existing and future residents.	Comprehensive coverage is not achieved and the list of products is not representative. Contacts engaged within through the preparation of the Housing Strategy should be initially approached and added to on the basis of an understanding of current stockholdings. Other Registered Providers not active in Stoke-on-Trent could be approached separately.	Housing Development	Short term
1.3 Use the Local Plan to ensure that land proposed to be allocated will provide a sufficient range of affordable home ownership tenders.	Potential developers, housebuilders, etc, will have access to a supply of housing land which is deliverable to provide for a range of affordable home ownership properties.	Delay to Local Plan process. Progression of the Local Plan to adoption is a priority of the Council.	Planning	Medium term

2. Delivering a wider range of quality housing for owner occupiers

To require all new housing to contribute to raising the quality of housing in the city and to encourage the delivery of larger and higher-value homes to address a longstanding gap in our housing offer.

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
2.1 Review the supply of land identified as suitable for residential development within the council's Housing Land Availability Statement / call for sites to identify sites which can reasonably be expected to deliver larger / higher-value homes.	A portfolio of sites which have the potential to deliver larger / higher value. The review will need to include a process of soft-market testing with the owners / representatives of the sites identified to confirm intentions and market demand for such homes on each site.	An insufficient supply of appropriate sites are identified and/or there is insufficient evidence to confirm that such housing will be provided on them.	Housing Development	Short-Medium term
2.2 Maintain and build the relationship deal with Homes England to focus on the delivery of new housing on identified brownfield land and explore opportunities to unlock public sector funding.	Delivery of larger higher-value homes on sites which would otherwise not be delivered as a result of market failure / viability. Generation of wider positive regeneration / socio-economic benefits on surrounding neighbourhoods.	Sites identified are ineligible for funding sources or suitable land cannot be identified.	Housing Development	Short-Medium term
2.3 Create a policy setting out the council's expectations as to the quality and design of new housing ¹ .	Policy used to engage housebuilders / developers in the planning process with the potential to integrate principles through the progression of housing policies within the Local Plan. Increase in new homes integrating best practice energy efficiency measures to contribute towards achieving net zero targets.	Developers/ housebuilders challenge the Local Plan Process and the application of design and/or energy efficiency aspirations with reference to viability challenges / nature of development sites recognising comparatively low values across large parts of the city.	Planning	Medium term

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
2.4 Work with Fortior Homes to ensure that the objective of delivering higher value / larger housing is incorporated within their forward business plan.	Identification of a future pipeline of development activity for Fortior Homes which ensures the provision of quality housing in identified areas of priority intervention.	An insufficient supply of appropriate sites are identified and/or there is insufficient evidence to confirm that such housing will be provided on them.	Housing Development	Short-Medium term
2.5 Commission an audit of the existing distribution of older persons housing and research into the implications of changing aspirations and needs on locational preferences and typologies of provision.	Understanding as to potential geographic gaps in the supply of homes suitable for older households and the relationship with changing aspirations related to the location and type of homes that older households desire / need. This will include a consideration of international best practice and surveys of older cohorts of the housing market undertaken in other locations / nationally.	Available budget to commission research. Sufficient response to research from older people.	Enabling and Projects / Housing Development	Medium term

3. Encourage custom and self-build housing

To support existing and would-be residents of Stoke-on-Trent to either build their own home (self-build) or to commission the construction of a custom-built property if they want to.

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
3.1 Communicate with each entrant on the self-build register in the last 12 months to determine their sustained interest and to provide support / guidance to satisfy their requirement.	Translation of expression of interest / demand into the development of new self-build homes thereby increasing the number of such homes incrementally.	Resources available to actively engage with applicants are not sufficient. Expectations are raised without adequate land to meet needs.	Housing Development	Medium term
3.2 Develop a pack of material to provide to individuals / organisations expressing an interest in self-build housing in Stoke-on-Trent explaining the planning process / mortgage finance and other aspects with which the council can support	Informed applicants enabled to achieve a swifter translation of an aspiration into the development of a self-build home.	Skills available within the team. Potential to commission external support to develop information and/or review and draw upon best practice from other authorities.	Housing Development	Medium term
3.3 Ensure an accessible list of development plots is publically available and replenished. This will include clear reference to where individual sites are considered to offer the potential to provide more specific housing types (e.g. larger housing / specially designed older person accommodation).	Existing / potential residents are able to easily appraise available land options with choice available to match a range of requirements for different sizes / types of home.	A sufficient breadth of land which can be identified as appropriate for self-build does not exist in the city. The Local Plan process should work to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of land which is suitable for self-build development.	Housing Development	Medium term

4. Getting the student housing offer right

To ensure that students' experiences of higher and further education in Stoke-on-Trent are positively influenced by the choice of housing that is available.

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
4.1 Regularly review housing needs evidence to support the Local Plan. This will include understanding future student numbers.	Minimum of three year forecast of anticipated pupil numbers kept up-to-date and publically documented. This will input into an annual published student need/ demand statement which will provide a consistent basis for pre-application advice / planning decision making for applicants looking to develop purpose-built student accommodation in the city.	Universities unable to provide business plan information for public use and/ or stated uncertainties in forecasting over longer-time horizons.	Planning	Short-Medium term
4.2 Ensure the Local Plan provides a clear policy framework to support the provision of a supply of student housing which will accommodate identified needs and ensure a supply of quality accommodation.	Policy support for new student housing where there is a proven need/demand in order to ensure that provision is neither under or over-supplied.	Delay to the Local Plan means this policy framework is not in place. The preparation and adoption of the Local Plan remains a priority of the council.	Planning	Short-Medium term

5. A council housing offer which meets the needs of residents

To raise the standard of the council's housing offer and the sense of place, to ensure that it meets the aspirations of our residents and communities, responding to their changing needs.

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
5.1 Continue to pro-actively diagnose individual difficult to let properties and prepare action plans to address factors prohibiting letting.	Reduction in voids where difficult to let properties are identified and an action plan put in place to ensure current issues are addressed to enable property to be let and occupied.	Scale of difficult to let properties means resources must be focussed. Landlords unwilling / unable to work with the Council.	Homelessness, Allocations and Voids	Short term
5.2 Implement the downsizing incentives scheme.	Quantum of family sized / larger homes freed up for occupation and residents needs better met in more suitably sized accommodation.	Lack of take-up of the scheme. Importance of ensuring properties for 'right-sizing' are available and sufficiently attractive / affordable to incentivise moves.	Housing Management	Short term
5.3 Refresh the Older People's Housing and Accommodation Strategy.	An updated strategy which takes account of the latest evidence of need and best practice in order to provide, in partnership with the private sector, a new supported housing offer which helps a range of vulnerable groups alongside older people.	Insufficient capacity and resource to deliver.	Enabling and Projects Team	Medium term
5.4 Deliver the priorities and vision of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy including the publication of a Homelessness Charter.	Progress towards the eradication of rough sleeping in the city by 2024.	Resources and capacity not sufficient to implement all stated priorities.	Homelessness, Allocations and Voids	Short-Medium term

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
5.5 Support delivery of the Draft Domestic Abuse Strategy Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent 2021-2024	Increased level of settled accommodation by providing support with accommodation for large families and those with complex housing histories. Incorporating housing needs into future plans.	Resources and capacity not sufficient to implement action.	Housing Management / Housing Development	Short-Medium term
5.6 Engage proactively with registered providers early in the planning process to ensure that new affordable homes respond to evidenced need / gaps in the existing stock with regards size and tenure options.	A stock profile which better matches the needs of residents in the city and ensures flexibility to respond to forecast changing needs linked to demographic trends which shows an ageing of the population.	Registered Providers unwilling to engage with the council. To overcome such issues the council will be pro-active in its approach and clear in its advice / rationale to demonstrate the benefits of early engagement.	Planning / Housing Development	Short-Medium term
5.7 Implement the Housing Customer Engagement Strategy.	Improved resident engagement and the provision of a greater range of choices to encourage harder-to-reach residents to engage with the council.	Availability of resources to implement and sustain processes of engagement development of relationships with communities.	Housing Management / Enabling and Projects Team	Medium term
5.8 Support Unitas in the development and progression of its future business plan.	Sustainable growth of Unitas to enable it to increase its activities whilst maintaining high levels of customer service and value for money.	Lack of committed resources and governance capacity to enable growth.	Enabling and Projects Team	Medium term
5.9 Develop an action plan and programme of investment to ensure that the council's stock accords with future updates to the Decent Homes Standard.	Proactive approach to compliance with national standard and strong foundations established to achieve zero carbon housing stock by 2050.	Potential identification of significant investment consequences.	Enabling and Projects Team	Medium-Long term

6. Partnership working with Registered Providers

To increase the amount of housing owned and managed by Registered Providers in Stoke-on-Trent.

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
6.1 Establish a programme of structured meetings with key Registered Providers operating in the city to maintain an understanding of investment plans and any obstacles to delivery as well as dissemination of best practice.	Main Registered providers in the city supported to realise their ambitions to deliver new housing in Stoke-on-Trent. Engagement will also provide a dissemination of 'best practice' regards the quality of service to ensure consistency across all tenants.	Registered Providers are unable to commit to scheduled meetings. The value to Registered Providers of the meetings must be clearly conveyed by the Council.	Housing Development	Short-Medium term
6.2 Identify and correspond directly with Registered Providers of scale not currently operating in the city.	Articulation of the development opportunities in the city to Registered Providers without stock currently in order to attract new development and encourage an increased diversity of new affordable tenure products.	Lack of interest from Registered Providers who have not already sought to invest in housing in Stoke-on-Trent. Approach will need to clearly articulate the scale of the opportunity and the support the council can provide to incentivise investment.	Housing Development	Medium-Long term
6.3 Arrange a workshop and follow-up actions with Registered Providers to discuss and explore the implications of additional requirements associated with the upcoming Future Homes Standard.	Full understanding of the issues which will be faced by the sector as a result of the implementation of the Future Homes Standard and a commitment to share best practice and developed innovations to accelerate compliance.	Commitment required across all parties to share information and approaches.	Housing Development	Short-Medium term

7. A refresh of obsolete affordable housing stock

To be visionary in addressing less well performing affordable housing stock, so called ‘obsolete stock’, which does not, or will not, satisfactorily meet the needs of tenants and is, therefore, unsustainable in the medium to longer-term.

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
7.1 Establish a new aspirational quality and safety-based standard for the Council's property portfolio.	Ensure that all stock adheres to best practice and sets a benchmark for private/market housing across the city to match.	Changes to standards will need to be closely monitored to ensure it remains up-to-date and truly aspirational.	Enabling and Projects / Housing Management	Short-Medium term
7.2 Develop a package of support which will be implemented to households, directly or indirectly, affected by the removal of stock.	Communities affected by planned losses of stock are successfully managed through the transition process. This will require engagement from the point at which the potential for demolition is identified based on the outcomes of the assessment of stocks future sustainability.	Communities are disrupted as a result of relocations and delays in the provision of replacement housing.	Housing Management / Housing Development	Medium-Long term
7.3 Ensure knowledge of and co-ordination of Registered Providers' intentions to remove stock within the city.	Ensure that programmes of stock removal are co-ordinated across both the Council and Registered Providers to minimise disruption and address all stock classified as unsustainable.	Registered Providers do not engage. This will require careful co-ordination and alignment with the actions under objective 6.	Housing Development	Short-Medium term

8. Improving the city's private rented housing stock

To improve the physical condition and management of the private rented stock in the city to achieve a higher occupancy rate within the tenure and ensure that tenants are treated fairly and with respect.

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
8.1 Deliver the priorities and actions set out within the recently published Empty Homes Strategy	Reduction in the number of empty homes in the city.	Insufficient staff capacity to identify empty homes and resources available to support owners to bring them back into occupation.	Private Sector Housing Team	Short term
8.2 Delivery of the Private Sector Enforcement Strategy.	Enforcement action taken against landlords operating illegally to ensure that tenants are not living in or subjected to sub-standard accommodation or letting arrangements.	Insufficient resources available to act on all cases identified through the implementation of the strategy.	Private Sector Housing Team	Short term
8.3 Support the Landlord Accreditation Scheme.	Increased membership with specific evidence of harder-to-reach and lesser performing landlords joining the scheme.	Most challenging landlords resistant to joining with little engagement	Private Sector Housing Team	Short term
8.4 Increase online presence of the Empty Homes Team.	Problem properties more efficiently identified and registered therefore saving resources in having to identify individual properties directly.	Online profile not accessible to all.	Private Sector Housing Team	Short term
8.5 Update and assemble information for landlords as to resources available to assist with property adaptations.	Increase in the adaptation of properties to support longer tenancies where needs of households change. Secondary impact of reduced turnover of lettings and more established communities.	Resources available to support adaptations do not keep pace with demand once promoted.	Private Sector Housing Team	Short-Medium term

Action	Outcome	Key Risks Identified	Lead	Target Completion Date
8.6 Implement new means of engaging with private sector tenants who are being exploited by bad landlords.	Increase in residents living in private sector housing reporting bad practice / failures of landlords thereby ensuring that challenges are addressed and the number of residents living in sub-standard conditions is reduced.	Cohort is difficult to reach and methods deployed are not sufficient to overcome barriers.	Private Sector Housing Team	Short-Medium term
8.7 Implement new means of engaging with private sector landlords who are looking to serve an eviction notice due to bad tenants.	Increase in landlords seeking support to deal with bad tenants thereby ensuring that challenges are addressed and the number of residents living in sub-standard conditions is reduced.	Cohort is difficult to reach and methods deployed are not sufficient to overcome barriers.	Private Sector Housing Team	Short-Medium term
8.8 To provide energy efficiency upgrades for low income households living in private sector low energy efficiency homes and those households suffering from fuel poverty in our city.	Reduce fuel poverty by making homes thermally comfortable, efficient, and well-adapted to climate change.	Resources available to support energy efficiency measures do not keep pace with demand once promoted.	Private Sector Housing Team	Short-Medium term

Appendix 2: Monitoring Arrangements

Monitoring of this Housing Strategy will be undertaken through established strategy monitoring arrangements, reporting progress on a six-monthly basis through the Housing Development and Growth management team and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environment.





City of
Stoke-on-Trent