



# Housing Strategy 2021-23

# Summary

This Strategy sets out how Ashfield District Council (ADC) will meet its objective of ensuring the population of Ashfield are living in, or can access, homes that are affordable, warm and within a safe community that promotes the health and wellbeing of residents.

The Housing Strategy is an overarching strategy that is supported by the 4 sub-strategies below. It identifies the cross-cutting and emerging issues that affect delivery of the sub-strategies, such as providing excellent customer service to residents and using technology to deliver services more effectively.

The 4 sub-strategies are:

- 1. Affordable Housing Delivery Strategy**
- 2. Private Sector Renewal Strategy**
- 3. Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy**
- 4. ADC 30 year Housing Investment Programme**

See Appendix 1 for further information on each of these.

Each strategy has an action plan setting out the workplan for the year ahead. The priorities for 2021-23 include (see appendix 2 for the full list of priorities):

- **Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping**
- **Developing new Council homes**
- **Improving standards in the private rented sector (PRS)**
- **Maintaining and improving Council homes, including their energy efficiency**
- **Providing excellent customer service to residents**
- **Using technology to deliver services more efficiently**

# Summary continued

Below is a summary of what was achieved under the Housing Strategy 2018-20

- **Committed to (and will achieve) building over 100 new Council House units by 2025**
- **Nearly £2m worth of Government grant secured in 2021 alone to provide greater thermal efficiency in both our privately owned and our own housing stock.**
- **Issued over £75,000 worth of civil penalties to unscrupulous private landlords in the last 2 years with a further £50k pending**
- **Completed the first enforced sale of a private property that was in serious disrepair**
- **Introduced new HMO regulations and Mobile Homes licensing regime to improve rented conditions**
- **Installed an average of 100 major adaptations per year in private properties to help residents maintain their independence**
- **Made an offer of accommodation to all street homeless households during the pandemic 2020/21**
- **Worked in partnership to secure over £1m in external funding each year for rough sleeping services across Nottinghamshire**
- **Helped secure external funding to continue the Serenity Refuge Scheme for women fleeing domestic abuse**
- **Increased the capacity of the homelessness team to support as many residents as possible before they reach crisis point**

# Emerging policy context

A number of new challenges and opportunities have emerged since the last housing strategy was developed, four key policy areas have been identified:

- Decarbonisation
- Using technology to deliver services more efficiently
- Providing excellent customer service to residents
- Regulatory changes affecting landlord and tenants in the social housing and private rented sectors

The national and local policy context for each of these areas is discussed below

## Decarbonisation

This section focuses on the zero carbon policies that affect the housing stock in Ashfield, across all tenures. It also highlights the opportunities and challenges to minimise the carbon footprint of the Housing & Assets directorate.

It should be noted that there is no universal definition of a zero carbon home and Ashfield District Council may need to agree its own definition and ambition.

## National context

In the last 12 months alone, there have been a range of policy announcements relating to achieving the Government’s legally binding

target under the Climate Change Act 2008 to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Housing is a key area of focus as it is responsible for around 20% of UK emissions – the target for emissions reduction will not be met without near complete decarbonisation of the housing stock.

Recent national announcements include:

- A target to install 600,000 heat pumps per year by 2028
- Introduction of the Futures Homes Standard by 2025 which requires a significant improvement new build housing standards to reduce carbon emissions by 75-80%
- To upgrade existing homes to achieve EPC Band C by 2025 in the private rented sector and 2035 in other sectors
- Phasing out the installation of new gas boilers from 2025
- To power every home in the UK with offshore wind energy by 2030

Whilst these are national objectives involving government action, ADC will have new obligations to meet as a result. There have also been a range of funding announcements made in recent months, many of which ADC is eligible to apply for – please see below.

## Local context

Analysis of the national EPC database shows the energy performance across the district is as follows<sup>1</sup>:

	Owner occupier	Private Rented	Social Rented	% of all properties
<b>A</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>G</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>

This shows that the owner occupier sector and PRS have a similar percentage of properties rated in Band F and G, and around a quarter of each tenure are rated as Band E. There are 20,446 properties in all tenures below a Band C and therefore requiring improvement works by either 2025, 2028 or 2035, depending on which policy applies to the property. Properties owned by the Council are already scheduled to receive the necessary improvements to achieve EPC Band C by 2030.

There are a number of initiatives currently live in Ashfield that support decarbonisation of the housing stock across all tenures:

- **Affordable warmth installations**
- **ECO**
- **Eon Warm Homes Hub**
- **Funding applications**

The Disabled Facilities Grant Team provide grants to a number of households each year to install affordable warmth solutions – in 2020/21, around £125,000 grant funding was awarded. They also assist households to access support from energy suppliers through the ECO scheme.

Eon operate a Warm Homes Hub using Warm Homes Funding to provide free first time gas central heating systems and insulation measures across Nottinghamshire on behalf of all Nottinghamshire local authorities, as well as offering free energy efficiency advice.

The Council reviews Government funding opportunities as they are announced and submits applications to this funding as appropriate. At the time of writing these include:

- Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery (LAD)
- Green Home Grant (GHG) Voucher Scheme
- Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund
- Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme
- Public Sector Low Carbon Skills Fund

<sup>1</sup>Accessed 19th October 2020, records without an address detailed have been excluded. Note that post-improvement EPCs are not always completed, including by ADC.

During 2020/21, the Council has secured almost £2m from these funding opportunities to improve the thermal efficiency in both Ashfield District Council homes and private sector stock.

The Council is also adding to the housing stock through its programme of affordable housing development, delivered via either new build development, conversion or acquisition of existing properties from the open market. Other social housing providers will also develop new affordable housing in the district. The Council is on track to deliver 100 new affordable homes by 2025.

The specification for new homes includes A-rated gas combination boilers and all properties meet the thermal efficiency standards required by Building Regulations (recently developed homes were rated as EPC band B).

The Council has established a standard component specification that applies to all properties; currently this does not include technologies such as air or ground source heat pumps, solar photovoltaic panels or mechanical ventilation heat recovery systems, though it is piloting such technologies on its new sheltered accommodation by way of commuted sum funding. One concern regarding these technologies is the knowledge and skills within the Council's technical services team to specify, procure, maintain, repair and replace these systems. There are additional concerns regarding the increased build cost that results from including these technologies and the willingness of mortgage lenders to accept homes constructed using Modern Methods of Construction.

New developments are constructed by a range of developers, determined by the outcome of a procurement exercise. As a result, the extent of carbon usage within the construction process is managed by the developer. However, there is an opportunity to include social value and/or environmental scoring as part of the procurement exercise in order to drive changes to this.

### **Tackling fuel poverty**

There is an opportunity to tackle fuel poverty through decarbonising homes, however, there are a number of important considerations to weigh up that could negatively impact on fuel poverty which is a priority issue within the Ashfield district, namely that there is a risk of increasing energy costs if residents are required to use a more expensive fuel, i.e. electricity (as used by ground/air source pumps) rather than gas.

It will be important to assess the impact on fuel poor households of any decarbonisation projects and actions.

### **Green service delivery**

Ashfield District Council in partnership with Nottingham City Council is developing its corporate zero carbon strategy which covers both the carbon used in the delivery of council services as well as the district-wide carbon usage.

In delivering the services and completing the actions identified in this strategy, a low carbon approach will be taken in line with the corporate strategy.

## 2021-23 actions

Monitor the rapidly evolving national policy context, respond to consultations as appropriate and implement new standards as and when required

Continue to apply for Government Green Homes funding as appropriate

Increase the knowledge and skills of relevant teams in low carbon heating technologies

Explore procurement opportunities to improve the social value outcomes of development projects

Explore procurement opportunities to minimise carbon emissions from development projects

Carry out a fuel poverty impact assessment for any decarbonisation projects that will increase fuel costs for the tenant or resident

Adopt low carbon working practices across Housing & Assets where possible

### Using technology to deliver services more efficiently

This section considers both the changing expectations of residents to access services online, at a time to suit them, as well as how technology can support ADC to deliver services with fewer resources.

#### Local context

It is a corporate objective to increase the use of technology to deliver services to residents and enhance the way in which staff work on a day to day basis. It is the aim of the Housing & Assets directorate to provide services via digital channels to as many tenants as possible, and the remainder will be provided through a face to face appointment in their own home, rather than being asked to visit a town centre office.

There are a number of projects already in progress, including: a newly launched website, a self-serve portal for tenants that allows them to check their rent account and log repairs, and a new repairs scheduling system that will reduce journey times by grouping similar repair jobs in similar areas. Paperless working across all teams has been introduced and mobile working devices have also been issued to all relevant teams. Many of these projects are in their early stages and it will be important to monitor how effective these projects are in improving service delivery.

To further enhance the efficiency of services, there is also an opportunity to review working practices and processes to ensure they are as lean and efficient as possible.

## 2021-23 actions

Monitor the tenant and resident satisfaction with delivery of services using technology

Monitor staff satisfaction and effectiveness of delivering services using technology

Explore options to offer self-appointing repairs

## **Providing excellent customer service to residents**

This section focuses on the national policy position around professionalism and the Ashfield District Council position around recruitment and retention of top performing staff.

### **National context**

The Social Housing Green paper, published in August 2018, highlighted that too many of the residents that engaged in the development of this paper felt they were treated with contempt by their landlord – that they were spoken down to, or treated as a nuisance, and that this contributed to a sense of stigma. To address this, the paper suggests social landlords embed a customer service culture and professionalise housing management teams.

The Chartered Institute of Housing launched a Professional Standards Framework in March 2021 that housing professionals can use to assess their knowledge, skills and behaviours in 7 areas of competence, these are:

- 1. Integrity**
- 2. Inclusive**
- 3. Ethical**
- 4. Knowledgeable**
- 5. Skilled**
- 6. Advocate**
- 7. Leadership**

The Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety by Dame Judith Hackitt also highlighted the importance of professional competence and as a result the draft Building Safety Bill, published in July 2020, includes a requirement for 'higher-risk' buildings to have a designated 'accountable person' and 'building safety manager'. The definition of higher-risk buildings is being finalised through the legislative process and may be determined either by the height, construction or occupancy of a building. These roles will have a duty to engage with residents, guided by a residents' engagement strategy. A Steering Group of the Hackitt Review also recommended the competencies that roles such as the Building Safety Manager should have to satisfactorily perform the role.

The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, published in July 2020, references the need for competent officers to be responsible for handling complaints and that unprofessional behaviour is a cause of complaints. It should also be noted that the Housing Ombudsman is now publishing cases of severe maladministration in order to make its work transparent. In 2019/20, there were 5 severe maladministration cases, 2 of which involved local authority landlords. These cases are also referred to The Regulator of Social Housing, who also publishes details of their judgements, regulatory breaches and sector reviews.

Finally, the Social Housing White Paper, published in November 2020, committed to establish a review of professional training and development to consider the appropriate qualifications and standards for social housing staff in different roles, including senior staff, with a particular focus on customer service requirements and mental health support. The White Paper reiterates the need identified in the Green Paper for staff to act professionally, with courtesy, respect, competence and empathy. As part of the changes introduced by the White Paper, all social landlords will be subject to regular inspection by the Regulator for Social Housing.

### **Local context**

The Council has its own competency frameworks (one for employees and one for leaders) that each employee is expected to understand and operate in line with.

A limited number of roles within the Housing & Assets directorate require either a specific qualification, certification or membership of a professional body. The notable exceptions are the Private Sector Enforcement Team and operatives within the Technical Services team.

There have been an increasing number of staffing challenges in recent months, either due to low interest or low quality candidates for vacant positions, staff moving into newly created roles as part of a restructure, a requirement for new skills and knowledge due to policy and regulation changes, or limited development opportunities being provided to staff keen to progress. There are also succession planning concerns for a number of roles.

### **2021-23 actions**

Complete the Social Housing White Paper Action Plan (See appendix 3)

With support from HR and the Local Government Association, create a workforce talent and skills plan

## Regulatory changes

### Social housing regulation

A significant change in the regulatory landscape for social housing providers has been announced in the Social Housing White Paper. The White Paper introduces a significant number of changes that will require investment of considerable time and resources across the Council in order to achieve compliance. Changes include:

- Legally required nominated senior person responsible for complying with health and safety requirements
- **A nominated senior person responsible for complying with the Regulator's Consumer Standards**
- A nationally prescribed set of tenant satisfaction measures, with results published regularly by landlords
- **A requirement to publish a breakdown of expenditure, including management costs and executive remuneration**
- A system of routine 4 yearly inspections by the Regulator for social landlords
- **An annual desktop review of a range of information sources by the Regulator**
- A requirement for enhanced and regularly improved tenant engagement
- **A review of the Decent Homes Standard considering decarbonisation and energy efficiency, neighbourhood and homes safety, and improved communal and green spaces.**
- Publication of a recent review of local authority allocation schemes
- **A requirement for a policy on tackling domestic abuse**

The local authority sector has already seen the introduction of the Rent Standard in April 2020, which enacted the previously announced Government policy to allow social housing rents to be increased by a maximum amount of CPI + 1% each year between 2020 and 2025.

As highlighted above, two local authorities received a decision of severe maladministration from the Housing Ombudsman in 2019/20 and in addition, this year there has been a 76% increase in the number of referrals to the Regulator of Social Housing relating to LAs, with breaches of the Home Standard found in 7 of these cases. The most common source of these referrals is third parties (i.e. whistleblowers).

A number of changes to the Housing Ombudsman Scheme came into effect on 1st September 2020 to improve awareness, accessibility and speed of complaint resolution. The updated scheme includes:

- **A Complaint Handling Code**
- **A power to issue complaint handling failure order**
- **The ability to conduct systemic or thematic investigations beyond an individual's complaint or landlord**

In addition, it is proposed in the Draft Building Safety Bill that the democratic filter is removed to allow direct access to the Housing Ombudsman and enable faster redress.

A dedicated action plan to implement the requirements of the Social Housing White Paper is in progress and regular updates will be provided to leaders and Members. Housing.

## PRS regulation

There have been a range of changes to the regulations affecting the private rented sector, some of which are enforced by the Private Sector Enforcement Team (PSE), some of which are the responsibility of Nottinghamshire County Council to enforce, but who may choose to enlist the services of the PSE team. The pace of change in regulation looks set to continue meaning that the PSE team are constantly having to adapt and evolve their working processes. A number of these changes provide opportunities to raise income to fund the work of the team. Anticipated changes in the near future include:

- An overhaul of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System

- **Target for PRS properties to meet EPC Band C brought forward to 2025**

- Introduction of a national property EPC compliance and exemptions database

- **Extension of PRS regulations to letting agents and online property platforms**

- All PRS properties to require 5 yearly electrical inspection

- **The end of no fault evictions through Section 21 notices and the introduction of lifetime deposits under the Renters Reform Bill**

In addition, the Selective Licensing scheme in operation across the district will come to the end of its first 5 year term in February 2022. A review of the scheme is required and decision on the future of the scheme needs to be taken. If the scheme is to end, an exit strategy is required to ensure appropriate enforcement and advice is still provided in these areas.

## 2021-23 actions

Complete the Social Housing White Paper Action Plan (See appendix 3)

Monitor the rapidly evolving national policy context, respond to consultations as appropriate, and the implement new standards/regulations as and when required

Review the Selective Licence Scheme that is due to expire 31st January 2022 (if appropriate, commence consultation to extend by 1st August 2021)

The Housing Strategy Action Plan for 2021-23 is summarised in the table below:

<b>Decarbonisation</b>
Monitor the rapidly evolving national policy context, respond to consultations as appropriate and implement new standards as and when required
Continue to apply for Government Green Homes funding as appropriate
Increase the knowledge and skills of relevant teams in low carbon heating technologies
Explore procurement opportunities to improve the social value outcomes of development projects
Explore procurement opportunities to minimise carbon emissions from development projects
Carry out a fuel poverty impact assessment for any decarbonisation projects that will increase fuel costs for the tenant or resident
Adopt low carbon working practices across Housing & Assets where possible
<b>Using technology to deliver services more efficiently</b>
Monitor the tenant and resident satisfaction with delivery of services using technology
Monitor staff satisfaction and effectiveness of delivering services using technology
Explore options to offer self-appointing repairs
<b>Providing excellent customer service to residents</b>
Complete the Social Housing White Paper Action Plan (See appendix 3)
With support from HR and the Local Government Association, create a workforce talent and skills plan
<b>Regulatory changes</b>
Complete the Social Housing White Paper Action Plan (See appendix 3)
Monitor the rapidly evolving national policy context, respond to consultations as appropriate, and the implement new standards/regulations as and when required
Review the Selective Licence Scheme that is due to expire 31st January 2022

## APPENDIX 1

### ADC Corporate Plan

Ashfield District Council's Corporate Plan 2019-23 identifies that affordable, warm and safe housing contributes to making Ashfield a great place to live. It sets out a vision to further improve housing services and housing provision for:

- **Those in need of affordable housing**
- **Those living in properties which need adapting and improving**
- **Residents needing to find accommodation**
- **Council housing tenants**

There are five project themes identified in the Corporate Plan to achieve this vision:

- **Housing development**
- **Tackling disrepair and poor housing conditions**
- **Suitable and appropriate housing**
- **Reduce and prevent homelessness**
- **Customer focus**

## ADC strategic housing framework

### **Affordable Housing Delivery Strategy**

**Enables and delivers the supply of affordable housing to meet demand**

**Aims:**

- Identify the scale of demand and supply of affordable housing in Ashfield district
- Maximise delivery of affordable homes by the Council on Council land
- Maximise the delivery of affordable homes by housing associations and private developers in the district

### **Private Sector Renewal Strategy**

**Improves standards in the private sector**

**Aims:**

- To reduce the number of non decent homes with category 1 hazards or chronic disrepair in the private sector
- To reduce the number of non-decent homes with high risk category 2 hazards
- To minimise the number of long-term empty properties
- To improve health and wellbeing outcomes through improving housing standards
- To ensure the health, safety and welfare of licensed caravan sites and their residents
- To target resources effectively to improve the health and wellbeing of all residents, in particular those within the privately rented sector

### **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy**

**Ensures the housing and support needs of homeless households are met**

**Aims:**

- Prevent as many residents as possible from becoming homeless
- Ensure options are available to ensure no one has to sleep rough other than through personal choice
- Help as many residents as possible to move seamlessly from one home to another without the need for emergency or temporary accommodation
- Provide a high quality service that customers indicate satisfaction with

### **ADC Housing Investment Programme (30 year)**

**Ensures ADC housing stock meets the Decent Homes Standard**

**Net zero aims:**

- to build homes to a good level of thermal efficiency to reduce carbon emissions, reduce running costs, increase disposable income and reduce fuel poverty
- to improve the thermal efficiency of its existing social housing portfolio, working towards a minimum EPC rating of C in advance of 2030 targets
- to increase levels of renewable technologies where economically viable in existing social housing portfolio
- to introduce measures where required to mitigate direct and indirect impacts of global warming e.g. overheating/flooding

There are other strategies and policies across the Housing & Assets Directorate that are relevant to the issues and actions identified in this strategy, such as:

- **The Allocations Policy**
- **The Housing Complaints Policy**

### Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy – 2021-23 Priorities

Work with partners to identify sustainable housing solutions for individuals continuing to rough sleep following accommodation offers made during Covid

Work with the PRS and relevant partners to minimise homelessness from the PRS following the end of Covid policies to suspend possession action

Increase the capacity and skills of the ADC Housing Options Team to meet the emerging challenges

Provide proactive advice and support Homefinder applicants who may be at risk of homelessness

Increase the use of digital solutions to provide advice and support, particularly for those at early risk of homelessness outside (i.e. prevention stage or earlier)

Increase the use of data and customer insight to understand the performance of the team and opportunities for improvement

### Private Sector Renewal Strategy – 2021-23 Priorities

#### Private Rented Sector

Respond to Government consultations relating to the review of the Health & Housing Safety Rating System as appropriate.

Introduce any required changes to policies and procedures as a result of the Government review of the Health & Housing Safety Rating System

Review the Selective Licence Scheme that is due to expire 31st January 2022 (if appropriate, commence consultation to extend by 1st August 2021)

Work with Nottinghamshire authorities to profile Ashfield's private sector stock using a range of data sources

Implement a Banning Order Policy

Develop service standards for Private Sector Enforcement setting out the service tenants and landlords can expect from the team

Raise awareness of the new electrical safety regulations and take enforcement action as necessary

Develop a standard template for pre-HMO licencing inspections

Continue to work with DASH, MDC and N&SDC to provide a landlord's forum twice a year

Further develop the training offer on PRS property standards for landlords

Proactively inspect all properties belonging to a landlord with at least one property in disrepair

## Empty Homes

The PSE Team will continue to use all available powers to bring as many empty properties back into use as possible. The Team will work in partnership with others teams such as Revenues and Benefits as required to achieve this.

## Caravan residents

Update enforcement policies and procedures as required following Government changes regarding trespass on private land

Update policies and procedures as required following changes to the Mobile Homes Act 2013 regarding compliance notices

## Health and housing

Update the Aids and Adaptations Policy and associated procedures

Review the eligibility criteria for Discretionary DFGs

Review the information provided to residents in person and online on the support available to them to stay well at home

Ensure we are working in partnership with all relevant agencies

Be an active member of the Nottinghamshire Consistency Group to ensure we are operating in line with other Nottinghamshire authorities and adopting best practices

Work with Nottinghamshire County Council to achieve Social Care Trusted Assessor status for the DFG Team

Introduce a case management software system and other digital solutions to minimise the use of paper-based and inefficient ways of working.

## Affordable Housing Delivery Strategy - 2021-23 Priorities

Deliver 100 new affordable homes by 2025

Continue to form partnerships with registered providers as required to deliver new affordable homes

Continue to maintain a register of sites in need of regeneration that could deliver additional homes

Continue to maximise the delivery of adapted homes on Council led or enabled developments

Explore all available opportunities to acquire properties and sites, including other public sector estate, regeneration opportunities, auction and private sale opportunities, s.106 properties.

Conclude the disposal options appraisal for Council owned land at Diamond Avenue and Clegg Hill

Complete the disposal of unviable garage sites to release capital for reinvestment

Identify Council community centres suitable for regeneration to provide new affordable homes

As part of the Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund Project, lead on any opportunities to deliver affordable housing

Ensure all commuted sums are utilised within the required timescales

Implement the recent national policy changes to the use of Right to Buy receipts

Update the specification for new build homes delivered by the Council to minimise carbon emissions

Monitor supply and demand in the affordable home ownership and s.106 markets, and work with Planning to address any challenges

Explore procurement opportunities to improve the value for money and quality of services provided by professional service partners such as architects, quantity surveyors, etc.

Explore procurement opportunities to improve the social value outcomes of development projects

Explore procurement opportunities to minimise carbon emissions from development projects

**Social Housing White Paper Action Plan Summary**

Introduce regular monitoring of regulatory risks and compliance

Appoint responsible officers required by the White Paper

Recruit additional resource as required to implement the requirements of the White Paper

Implement new property standards as and when introduced, including installing carbon monoxide alarms in all properties and achieving Decent Homes 2

Collect and publish new Tenant Satisfaction Measures when introduced

Publish required financial performance information

Implement changes to Housing & Assets Complaints Policy and complaints handling procedure as required

Regularly review compliance with existing and new consumer and economic regulations set out by The Regulator of Social Housing

Ensure regulatory breaches are quickly identified and reported promptly to the Regulator of Social Housing

Increase the opportunities for tenants to hold ADC as their landlord to account and influence the design and delivery of services

