



Housing Strategy

2014 - 2017

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce a new Housing Strategy for Warwick District Council (WDC). This is essential at a time when wide-ranging new legislation has been enacted not just in housing but in related policy areas such as planning, localism, public health, the environment and welfare reform.

The role that good quality housing can play in building and maintaining safe, inclusive and sustainable communities is well understood, as indeed is the contribution that housing makes to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals and their families. In establishing our plans for housing we are always mindful of these wider impacts and we have therefore embedded this strategy within the broader local policy framework set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Housing is a key priority within the Sustainable Community Strategy alongside four other themes: prosperity; health and well-being; safer communities; and sustainability. This strategy contributes to all of these:

- A healthy supply of housing within a reasonable distance of employment centres helps to support growth in the economy;
- Safe, warm, dry housing in a good state of repair and within existing community networks has a clear and positive impact upon people's health and also helps to improve the educational attainment levels of children;
- Council services help to reduce crime by careful estate design in new developments, by prompt action to repair vandalism and clean up graffiti, and by appropriate management strategies for dealing with anti-social behaviour; and
- The design and location of new housing has major direct and indirect impacts upon sustainability, cutting carbon emissions through energy efficiency measures and reducing the number of car journeys.

We have developed this strategy through a wide-ranging consultation with our partners and stakeholders and this has provided us with a rich source of interesting ideas, many of which we have taken on board. We will continue to draw upon these ideas as we prepare a more detailed delivery plan to take forward the objectives of this strategy.

The consultation responses also helped us to shape our three strategic objectives for housing:

- Enabling and providing services that help people to sustain their homes;
- Meeting the need for housing across the district; and
- Raising standards of management, repair and improvement of existing housing and neighbourhoods.

Over the next three years all of our actions as a council in housing and related areas will be consistent with these three priorities and by working within this framework we will make Warwick district a great place to live, work and visit.

Councillor Norman Vincett
Housing & Property Portfolio Holder

The context for the strategy

Warwick district

Warwick district covers an area of around 110 square miles in the southern half of the county of Warwickshire in the West Midlands and is home to around 58,700 households (137,600 people). The area includes the towns of Kenilworth, Leamington Spa, Warwick and Whitnash, which together accommodate around three-quarters of the population while the remainder live in a number of small rural villages many of which are in the green belt. The district is bordered to the south and west by Stratford-on-Avon district to the east by Rugby borough and to the north by Solihull and the city of Coventry.

The district is in a central part of the country and has good strategic transport links. The M40 runs across the area providing direct access to London and the south-east, and indirect links to the north-west and Scotland and to the south-west via the M6 and the M5 respectively. There are junctions of the M1 and A14 outside the district near Rugby, providing links to the north and east. There are good rail links to the rest of the West Midlands and to London. The government's preferred route for the new high-speed rail line "HS2" passes through the district.

Demographics

The population has grown significantly over the last ten years and is expected to continue to grow further in the future. The average age of the district's population is close to the national average (but the lowest in Warwickshire) while in fifteen-year age bands the only noticeable variations from the national pattern are slightly fewer people aged 0 to 14 and slightly more people aged 15 to 29.

Our district has the highest proportion of non- "White-British" people in the county at 16.6% but this is still lower than is the case nationally and regionally. The largest ethnic groups in the district after White-British are "Asian/Asian British: Indian" (4.9%) and "Other White" (4.2%).

Rugby (11.7%) and WDC (11.6%) have the highest proportions in the county of people who have come from abroad but these are still below the national average.

The types of household in the district show some interesting differences with the national, regional and county picture: we have one of the highest proportions of full-time students in the country (among the top 10%) and this feeds into an above average number of single-person households: the highest in the county.

Economy

Our local economy is diverse but three sectors account for over 70% of employment: "finance, IT, other business activities"; "distribution, hotels and restaurants"; and "public administration, education and health".

Compared to national and regional rates our unemployment rate of 4.7% in 2012/13 is considerably lower (and has been throughout the period from 2004 to the present) while average earnings for employees living in the district are higher at £30,500 in 2012.

Deprivation, health and social care

In the 2011 census 53% of households were not deprived in any sense, the highest figure in the county, 10% higher than the national average and 13% higher than the West Midlands. Only 17% were deprived in more than one way compared to 24% nationally and 27% regionally.

The population of the district is relatively healthy with 84.5% of the population being in good or very good health, the highest in the county and better than the national and regional averages. This is also true of the narrower age band: those aged 16 to 64.

More than 90% of people did not provide unpaid care, again the highest figure in the county exceeding national and regional averages.

The 2013 Department of Health profile for WDC states that the health of people in WDC is generally better than the England average. Deprivation is lower but an estimated 2,700 children in the district live in poverty and 17.6% of year 6 children are classed as obese. WDC fares significantly better than the national average on many health indicators but priority areas for action are identified as addressing alcohol misuse, smoking in pregnancy and tackling obesity.

Housing

There are 60,427 dwellings in the district and the profile is very different from the rest of the county. 18.5% of the stock is flats or maisonettes and a further 4.6% is flats in converted or shared houses, easily the highest in the county on both indicators. The overall figures for Warwickshire are 12.5% and 2.2% respectively. This has a distorting effect when looking at other property types but when this is removed and houses and bungalows only are considered the spread of terraced (28%), semi-detached (40%) and detached properties (32%) is broadly similar to the county average.

Our district has the highest proportion of one-bed properties (10%) and the highest proportion of two-bed properties (28%) in the county and a significantly smaller number of three-bed properties (37%) although this is still our most common property size. We also had the second highest proportion of properties with more than three bedrooms meaning that WDC has the most balanced mix of properties by size in the county.

In terms of tenure, again WDC differs from the rest of the county in that it has the lowest rate of owner-occupation (67%) and the highest rate of private renting (18%), both figures being higher than the national averages. The amount of social housing (13%) is the second lowest after Stratford-on-Avon and around 4% below the national average.

Data from recent stock condition surveys shows that the stock is mainly post-war with 73% of private housing and 85% of council housing having been built since 1945, compared to 59% and 81% respectively nationwide. However many of these dwellings are now over 50 years old.

The average (median) house price in WDC in 2010 was £210,000. This was 18% above the Warwickshire average and 43% above the West Midlands average indicating stronger demand for market housing compared to other parts of the region.

Analysis of Council Tax band data shows WDC to have property values fairly evenly spread across the price range: just over 26% of properties are in the lower value bands A and B (compared to 56% nationally) 48% are in the middle bands C and D (30% nationally) and just over 26% of properties in the district are in band E or higher compared to 13% nationally.

The policy framework

The national housing policy agenda

In 2010 the coalition government took office and set out its policy agenda within the overriding objective of reducing the deficit in the public finances. This agenda has been translated into action over the past three years through substantial pieces of legislation such as the Localism Act 2011 and the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and through two spending reviews: in October 2010 and June 2013.

The government's national policies for housing were set out in "Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England" in November 2011. This summarised a number of housing policies that were already being implemented at that time but added some new proposals aimed at unlocking the housing market and getting the building industry moving again. There have been further initiatives since then, particularly in the 2013 spending review.

The drivers for government housing policy are: increasing the number of available homes; improving the rented housing sector; providing housing support for older and vulnerable people; and helping people to buy a home.

There have also been significant reforms in a range of other policy areas that impact upon housing. These include planning policy, welfare reform and the Green Deal.

Regional policy context

The current government has a policy of localism which it describes as having power exercised at the lowest practical level, close to the people who are affected by decisions. This has meant that since 2010 there has been less emphasis upon regional governance, with much of the regional and sub-regional governance infrastructure having been abolished.

However there are still some requirements to work with our neighbouring authorities and we do still work with our partners on a regular basis where it is in our joint interests to do so. As an example the planning reforms mentioned above have removed regional planning structures but under the National Planning Policy Framework there is still a duty to cooperate with neighbouring local councils on issues that cross administrative boundaries and we have recently commissioned a sub-regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment with most of the other authorities in the county.

In terms of housing the most significant regional document is the Warwickshire Local Investment Plan (LIP) which was drawn up in partnership between the five district councils, the county council and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The purpose of the LIP was to draw out key county-wide themes and to help to direct investment, from the HCA and others, towards housing and regeneration schemes that could address the identified priorities. The four thematic priorities for the LIP are: meeting affordable housing growth needs; addressing rural housing growth and affordability; meeting housing needs of vulnerable groups; and improving existing housing stock. While the plan still carries weight it was finalised in March 2011 and at the time of writing consideration is being given to how this should be updated for the future.

The other major housing-related issue that is tackled at county-level is the social care and health agenda. A Health & Wellbeing Board (HWB) has been set up with strategic responsibility for producing a "Joint Strategic Needs Assessment" (JSNA) feeding into a strategy geared towards improving the health and wellbeing of the local population.

The JSNA identifies a number of key messages for housing: the demand for housing in Warwickshire will continue to grow; services for families will need to change to reflect the shifting make-up of family units and how they choose to live; welfare reform will have a key impact; and housing affordability is likely to remain an issue in Warwickshire.

The resulting Interim Health & Wellbeing Strategy has an aspiration that "In Warwickshire people will live longer, in better health and be supported to be independent for as long as possible. We will see the people of Warwickshire free from poverty, have a decent standard of living and no child will

start their lives at a disadvantage or be left behind.” It identifies three priorities: “mobilising communities to develop and sustain their independence, health and well-being”; “improving access to services”; and “public services – working together”.

Our vision as a council

In 2009 the Local Strategic Partnership for WDC, known as the Warwick Partnership, produced “A Shared Vision – Warwick District’s Sustainable Community Strategy 2009 – 2026”. This provided an over-arching vision for the whole area and sets the strategic direction for all of the work of the district council, including housing. The vision of the strategy, supported by the identification of four priority themes and five cross-cutting themes, was:

“Warwick District, a great place to live, work and visit, where we aspire to build sustainable, safer, stronger and healthier communities.”

The Warwick Partnership no longer exists and the strategy is now four years old but a recent review by senior managers found that it is still largely fit for purpose. In particular the vision is still appropriate and, after some minor amendment, so are the themes, which are now as follows:

<i>The refreshed Sustainable Community Strategy</i>	
Theme	Strategic aim
Prosperity	To improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of Warwick District by pursuing a balanced and sustainable growth agenda that delivers improvements in each of these areas whilst protecting those things that make the Warwick District special.
Health & well-being	To enable and encourage the people of Warwick District to have an equal access to a healthy life and sense of wellbeing, ensuring that our actions are aligned with the Warwickshire Health & Wellbeing Board’s Strategy.
Housing	To address the housing needs of those who wish to live and work in Warwick District.
Safer communities	To work in partnership to reduce violent crime, anti-social behaviour and re-offending.
Sustainability	To minimise our use of natural resources and CO2 emissions, improve the energy and water efficiency of our buildings and operations and source as much of our energy as possible from renewable sources. We will also act as a lead in the community on climate change and energy efficiency issues.

Geographically, based upon deprivation indices, the strategy targeted three areas, Brunswick ward, Crown ward and West Warwick. The aim was that no area should be in the worst 30% of small areas in the country.

Our housing priorities

A housing strategy needs to take account of the national context but also sits within the broad policy agenda set by the Sustainable Community Strategy referred to above. We also felt that it was important to consult widely. Fuller details of the process are set out at the end of this document.

Taking account of consultation the priorities for the strategy are:

- Enabling and providing services that help people to sustain their homes;
- Meeting the need for housing across the district; and
- Raising standards of management, repair and improvement of existing housing and neighbourhoods.

Further details on each of these are set out on the following pages, including some of the headline actions that we will take to address them. A full and much more detailed delivery plan will follow in due course.

Enabling and providing services that help people to sustain their homes

Tackling this priority will help to make WDC a great place to live, work and visit by:

- Supporting all sections of the community, including the homeless and people with specific needs, to quickly and effectively resolve any housing issues that they have;
- Ensuring a healthy local population, able to live independently with appropriate support where necessary; and
- Integrating housing and other services to ensure a co-ordinated approach to tackling wider issues such as crime and disorder, environmental improvement and educational attainment.

What people we consulted said.

- Helping people to live independently – a higher profile for the Home Improvement Agency and telecare.
- What housing support will be available for women fleeing abusive relationships?
- Educate householders to cope with benefit changes and money management.
- Make support services attractive to young people.
- Make stronger links to Health & Well-being and Sustainability objectives.
- Affordability: people are anxious about paying rent and other bills now.
- Provide effective housing advice services.
- Secure specialist housing support services for vulnerable customers, i.e. OAPs and disabled of all ages.
- Vulnerable people are exposed to high levels of risk in some areas where insufficient support leads to people who are drunk or drugged accessing shared property.
- Disabled young people have less residential learning options because of cutbacks.
- The under-occupation charge has created unprecedented levels of stress and concern for disabled people and their carers.
- Under-occupation charge should apply to pensioners as well.
- The under-occupation charge is unfair due to lack of one-beds.
- There is little choice for people using Care homes, some of those homes are very institutional and are run in very outdated styles, leaving people isolated from communities.
- There is a need to build on the building blocks of success already in place by mapping those services currently available. This will reduce overlapping, duplication and start to reduce a silo way of working that is rife across the district.
- Need for an Information Sharing Protocol for key players.
- Understand our customers in order to assess the need for services in the district.
- Set a Homelessness Action Plan based around: better partnership working; sustainable communities; preventing homelessness; making better use of existing stock; new build; and good practice.
- Hold local forums for young people on domestic & financial management.
- Promote balanced and sustainable communities, improve energy efficiency and affordable warmth.
- Gypsies and travellers using sites and not moving on.
- Benefits should go direct to landlords.
- Work with credit unions.
- Assist people with taking in lodgers.
- Where does the third sector fit in (partnership working)?
- Gather and publicise all grants available to assist with fuel bills.
- Travellers – valid information not hearsay.
- Regular inspections of property may highlight a person's need for support – home visits.
- How can social media be used?

Why we think this is a priority.

- Although our district as a whole comes out very well on many indicators when compared to national averages, nevertheless there are still some deprived areas and people in our communities who are in need of help to enable them to live independently or maintain their homes.
- Some 14% of households have support needs and 11% of these (around 900 households) currently live in unsuitable housing.
- The most common support needs are for alterations to bathrooms and toilets, for emergency alarms, for help maintaining the home, or for level-access showers.
- Population growth would add an estimated 3,000 households with a support need over the next twenty years.
- The age structure of the population is projected to change with people aged 60 or more estimated to increase by 32%. Furthermore the 75-and-over population is projected to increase by 53% and the 85-and-over population by 84% with clear implications for the type of housing that will be needed in the future.
- 20% of our households are living in fuel poverty, above the national average, and this position is likely to worsen as fuel cost increases continue to exceed inflation. Furthermore over 21% of housing falls into the two lowest ratings for Energy Performance Certificates.

We will tackle this priority by:

- Working with Warwickshire County Council as it identifies its priorities for housing-related support services that have in the past been funded by the Supporting People regime, such as people with mental health problems, people suffering domestic abuse, substance mis-users, and homeless people with support needs.
- Being fair and supportive but firm. This means using all available means to provide help and support to those who need it but also using our enforcement powers as a local authority for those who are causing problems (to themselves or to others) if they refuse to engage with or respond to our offer of help.
- Working with our partners across all sectors to support people in financial difficulties.
- Redesigning our service structure, reviewing policies and procedures across the service and developing service level agreements, internally and with service providers, to deliver better outcomes for customers.
- Reviewing and updating the homelessness strategy.
- Working with Warwickshire County Council on its extra-care programme providing more flexible housing-with-support options for older people.
- Continuing to provide grants/loans to help low-income owner-occupiers with essential repairs or to rectify dangerous conditions.
- Working with partners to raise awareness and educate residents on energy efficiency issues, assisting with grants and loans where appropriate and seeking to raise energy ratings, particularly in the private rented sector using the Housing, Health & Safety Rating System.
- Continuing to seek a proportion of properties built to the Lifetime Homes Standard on new-build schemes.
- Expecting new developments to achieve "secured by design" standards for the estate layout.
- Requiring new-build affordable housing to meet a minimum of Code For Sustainable Homes level 3 standard.
- Gaining a better understanding of the support needs of our tenants through annual customer visits, making every contact count by using feedback from repairs and gas servicing contractors to prioritise visits to customers.

Meeting the need for housing across the district

Tackling this priority will help to make WDC a great place to live, work and visit by:

- Managing the continued economic and population expansion of the district;
- Maintaining stable communities, particularly in rural areas, by meeting the considerable need for affordable housing from local people; and
- Providing a better balance between the market-rented and non-market rented sectors.

What people we consulted said.

- Develop specialist properties for older people with support on hand if needed.
- Explore how to make better use of the private rented sector to meet housing need.
- Build more properties.
- Rural needs – help rural communities identify need. Consensus from rural housing needs surveys seems to be that small discreet schemes are acceptable, responding to local need, taking into account local design etc.
- Student accommodation should be encouraged in the vicinity of the university.
- Adequate housing should be situated near to employment to cut down on commuting.
- Need for more one-bedroom and smaller accommodation to get people out of larger accommodation.
- Need to help people into shared ownership/first-time buying due to high costs.
- There appears to be a big increase in homelessness locally with many people sleeping rough – need research to find out why this is.
- Need more suitable accommodation for disabled people – young people forced to stay at home with family rather than live independently.
- Need more council housing.
- Work with planners to look at land usage.
- Need a proper analysis of what housing is required and where.
- Look at ways of increasing income/subsidies etc to make land more affordable to social housing providers.
- Build council housing or council could manage housing association housing.
- Social housing quota should be based on square footage.
- Provide incentives to build on infill sites as these are more expensive than out-of-town areas.
- Increase grants to encourage tenants to buy a property on the market.
- Underwrite bonds to private sector landlords.
- Accommodation for homeless – need a “transit” scheme, also need a foyer for single homeless people.
- Allocations policy – put sitting tenants first; local people should get priority.
- Other solutions – barges, trailer/caravan parks, pre-fabs, park homes, self-build, “kit” houses.
- Classify green-belt into poor or good quality and allow building on poor sites.
- Plan for population growth – based on accurate information and local consultation with residents.
- Look at Dutch model – houses in three-storeys where different generations live together, one on each level with mortgage for 100 years which each generation takes over.
- Make sure developers provide the social housing levels agreed at the start of developments.
- Stop rehousing people that own their own properties.
- There is an under-supply of affordable housing at entry-level to the market.
- Look at transport to allow people to live outwith the area to decrease demand.
- New developments should have mixed sizes and tenures: evens out values.
- Land acquisition for council build programme.

Why we think this is a priority.

- The population of WDC has grown rapidly, by 11.9% between 2000 and 2010, and is projected to continue to grow at around 0.7% per year over the next twenty years, an additional 18,300 people or 11,630 households by 2031.
- In our Revised Development Strategy (June 2013) we proposed to adopt an interim level of growth of 12,300 homes between 2011 and 2029.
- The net annual need for affordable housing exceeds the net need for additional homes due to a historic backlog in meeting need and to loss of affordable housing through Right To Buy.
- The number of people on the council's housing register has been around or above the 3,000 level for each of the last eight years.
- The number of homeless enquiries dealt with has more than doubled from 2009/10 to 2012/13 and the number that we accepted a duty to rehouse was two-and-a-half times greater in 2012/13 than in 2009/10.
- We have a statutory duty to meet the needs of the gypsy and traveller community and there is an identified need for 31 permanent and 6 to 8 transit pitches over the 15 year period of the Local Plan.
- Affordability is a huge issue in the district with the highest house prices and private sector rents.
- We have the largest private rented sector in Warwickshire but, while it is still growing, anecdotally it appears landlords may be moving away from tenants on Local Housing Allowance towards a different client group due to welfare reform.

We will tackle this priority in two ways.

1 By addressing the need for more homes:

- Updating and broadening our understanding of district and local housing markets and needs and responding to the findings of the new Joint Strategic Housing market Assessment.
- Completing the development of the new Local Plan to identify the land needed to deliver the housing that the district needs.
- Ensuring that larger housing schemes include an appropriate proportion of affordable housing and a sustainable mix of property types and sizes.
- Working with our partner housing associations to ensure that new affordable homes are provided by a mixture of social landlords across the district.
- Creatively using the council's assets and finance to deliver further new homes working in partnership with Waterloo Housing Group through the W2 Joint Venture.
- Investigating the best way of using the new financial freedoms to build new council housing.
- Looking to provide for the identified gypsy and traveller needs through the planning system.
- Restricting rents on Affordable Rent homes so that the average on any scheme is no more than the mid-point between average social rent and 80% of average market rent.
- Refreshing our approach to the provision of rural housing, taking account of the new scheme for neighbourhood planning.

2 By making the best use of existing stock:

- Developing a "Buy To Flip" policy whereby the council and its housing association partners consider purchasing existing homes for sale to let them on social or affordable rents.
- Reviewing the housing allocations policy, giving consideration to prioritising existing tenants, local connection policies, the potential use of fixed term tenancies and the handling of applicants with no housing need.
- Looking for new ways to incentivise people who are under-occupying their homes to move to more appropriate accommodation.
- Reviewing and updating our strategy for bringing empty homes back into use.
- Looking for opportunities to create more appropriate housing with a higher degree of energy efficiency by the modernisation, remodelling or regeneration of existing housing schemes and estates.

Raising standards of management, repair and improvement of existing housing and neighbourhoods

Tackling this priority will help to make WDC a great place to live, work and visit by:

- Improving living conditions for residents of the district;
- Ensuring warm, dry housing in a good state of repair, leading to a clear and positive impact upon people's health and improving the educational attainment levels of children;
- Improving affordability through improvements to the energy efficiency of the existing stock;
- Ensuring that housing conditions are not a barrier to employers seeking to locate in the district; and
- Contributing to the wider attractiveness of the built environment.

What people we consulted said.

- Persons in properties should look after them so they won't become slums.
- There should be a significant effort made to engage private landlords.
- Repair the older houses.
- There is a small band of landlords whose houses are in poor condition.
- Ensure stock continues to meet Decent Homes Standards.
- Redevelop low demand and poor housing.
- Big issue getting small repairs done, e.g. handyman service at Age UK.
- Need to promote balance and sustainable communities, improve energy efficiency and affordable warmth.
- Look at long-term empty homes to see if they can be brought back into use.
- Grants for adaptations appear to have ceased leaving families and individuals in overcrowded and poor situations.
- Customer-focussed housing provision is thin on the ground, despite policies around person-centred approaches.
- Too much Buy To Let in Leamington that is then let out to students.
- Set higher standards for new-build housing (energy efficiency).
- Have a grant (or loan) scheme for private sector landlords.
- Empty properties: use penalties and incentives.
- Insulation grants – engage landlords by promoting the benefits to them.
- Talk to lettings agents – they have more influence on landlords.
- Increase council stock condition information and develop most cost-efficient strategy to repair or re-build.
- What are you doing for leaseholders?
- Advise, assist and educate private landlords.
- Improve void turnaround times in council housing.
- All rented properties should be licensed.
- HMOs changing the face of communities. Do we need more purpose-built student housing?
- Consider council stock use and convert properties in line with need and demand.
- More HMOs to provide more and cheaper accommodation. By licensing these WDC appear to be restricting this. Policy should be looked at.
- WDC stock – continue insulation programme.
- Train other professionals to identify cat 1 hazards and report to the council.
- Incentivise landlord accreditation – make it valuable to landlords.

Why we think this is a priority, particularly in the private sector.

In the private sector

- There are almost 2,000 houses in multiple occupation, higher than the national average in percentage terms, and almost 80% of these are not subject to mandatory licensing. This type of housing traditionally has more difficulties associated with it in terms of management standards, fire safety and welfare of occupants. Similar issues arise in properties converted into flats. There are known to be well over 1,000 such flats in the district.
- 19% of the stock as a whole (and 34% of the private-rented stock) was built prior to 1919 and is therefore likely to have higher ongoing maintenance costs.
- 24% of the stock (and 32% of the private rented stock) does not meet the Decent Homes Standard. In terms of failure reasons 15% contain a category one health and safety hazard, 10% have a poor degree of thermal comfort, 3% are in need of repair and 0.4% lack modern facilities. (These do not add up to 24% due to some properties with multiple failures.)
- Generally the older properties have the higher rates of failure but there is one exception to this: properties built between 1965 and 1980 have significantly higher failure rates than would be expected. This is due to a large number of purpose-built flats and other dwellings in this age band with thermal comfort and excess cold issues.
- Energy efficiency in the private stock is around the national average of 52 on the government's Standard Assessment Procedure rating where 1 is poor and 100 is excellent.
- As at 31 May 2013 there were 1,131 empty properties (2% of the private stock) of which 368 had been empty for between 6 months and two years and 197 had been empty for more than two years.

In the social sector

- The majority of properties have been built more recently and therefore have fewer problems in terms of property condition and vacancies: all of the council's housing, and all but 12 housing association properties, meet the Decent Homes Standard.
- Over the next 50 years it is estimated that we will need to spend £661 million on our council housing stock of which £215 million is on cyclical, responsive and void repairs and £364 million is on capital works (the remainder is for on-costs).
- It took 35 days on average to relet a vacant council home during 2012/13.

We will tackle this priority by:

- Working to develop ways to inform and advise private landlords and tenants of their rights and obligations.
- Developing an enforcement policy for private sector housing to be followed where landlords fail to engage or respond to more informal approaches.
- Refreshing our data on Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and investigating whether to extend the licensing of HMOs to other HMOs not currently covered.
- Investigating whether to introduce additional licensing for buildings converted into flats and also for shared houses.
- Completing a pilot scheme remodelling Home Improvement Agency services on a cross-tenure basis across southern Warwickshire and evaluating the results.
- Building on our working relationship with the University of Warwick in relation to student housing in the district.
- Reviewing the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan to ensure that our approach to managing, maintaining and improving our own stock remains relevant and up-to-date.
- Engaging with our council tenants to develop a WDC Standard for homes and neighbourhoods that exceeds the Decent Homes Standard and that embraces customer choice where possible.
- Looking at how to creatively manage our housing assets by developing a new Asset Management Strategy.
- Reviewing our management of leaseholder properties.
- Introducing a programme of annual customer visits by Housing Officers to all our tenants.

The strategic process

In early 2013 a suggested template for the priorities for the strategy was prepared and approved by the council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee. This proposed three draft priorities: "meeting housing need"; "improving existing stock"; and "support services".

While undertaking a desktop analysis of the strategic environment within which the strategy was being developed, we publicised and circulated these priorities for comment to:

- Parish, town, district and county councillors;
- Warwick District Council housing staff and tenants' representatives;
- The Housing Sounding Board (which includes a range of voluntary sector organisations);
- Warwickshire County Council's Public Health, Supporting People and Social Care teams;
- Local housing associations' development and management staff;
- Warwickshire Rural Community Council;
- Neighbourhood forums;
- Neighbouring local authorities;
- Landlord Steering Group; and
- The Local Enterprise Partnership.

In addition an article was placed on the council's intranet inviting views from all staff, a press release was issued, an alert was put out on Twitter and a stand was taken at a Tenants' Open Day.

A large number of responses were received and there was very little disagreement that the three priorities were broadly correct although it became apparent that some amendment to the wording was required to encompass the wider range of issues raised. This resulted in the three priorities that have been considered in this strategy.

We then set about analysing the options for delivering those objectives. We again felt that it was important to involve stakeholders in this process so we held an Options Workshop session. This was a two-hour brainstorming session and was run three times during the day: in the morning, the afternoon and the evening. We invited all of the people and groups listed above and over the course of the day some 57 people attended to give their views.

At each session attendees were split up into three separate groups, one for each priority and, facilitated by a member of staff, each group discussed their priority and generated ideas as to what the council and its partners should be doing to try to tackle the issues. This provided us with an extensive list of comments and ideas which has informed the earlier sections of this document.

The strategy has set out the broad framework for housing and property services over the coming three years. To work towards achieving our objectives we will require a detailed delivery plan. There are a number of pieces of work currently underway and coming to fruition in the near future that need to be taken into account in setting out our delivery plan. These include:

- A Joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment being undertaken at a sub-regional level with four other local authorities;
- An appraisal of the methods of using the new financial freedoms in housing to maximise the delivery of more non-market housing; and
- An update of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

Each of these pieces of work will present options for the council to consider and by adopting this strategic framework in advance those options can be considered against the approved strategic priorities so that the chosen ways forward are directed towards our objectives. That is why we have not included a detailed plan in this strategy.

The delivery plan will be prepared over the coming months and will take account of:

- the headline actions set out in this strategy;

- the outcomes of the pieces of work referred to above; and
- the results of the consultation exercises.

Once the delivery plan has been approved it will be monitored by the Interim Housing & Property Services Board on a quarterly basis.

The strategy itself will be subject to a desktop review in twelve months' time to ensure that the priorities remain relevant and to a full review in two years' time in preparation for a new three year strategy from 2017.

Background documents and data sources

A Shared Vision: Warwick District's Sustainable Community Strategy 2009-2026
 Warwick District Council Strategic Housing Market Assessment (GL Hearn 2012)
 Warwick District Council Local Plan Revised Development Strategy (WDC, 2013)
 Warwickshire Observatory (<http://www.warwickshireobservatory.org/>)
 Census 2011 (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/index.html>)
 Nomis – official labour market statistics (<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>)
 Warwick Health Profile 2013 (Public Health England 2013)
 Warwick District Council Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey (ORS 2012)
 Warwick District Council Housing Business Plan 2012- 2062
 Laying the foundations: a housing strategy for England (HMG 2011)
 The Warwickshire Local Investment Plan (2011)
 Warwickshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2012/2013
 The Warwickshire Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board Interim Strategy (WCC 2013)
 Warwick District Council Homelessness Strategy 2010 – 2015
 Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment for Warwick District (Salford University 2012)
 Warwick District Council Empty Homes Strategy 2011-2014

Further information

Further information on housing issues in WDC and further copies of this strategy can be downloaded from www.warwickdc.gov.uk

For general queries about this strategy please telephone 01926 456335 or email yourview.housing@warwickdc.gov.uk

For general housing enquiries please telephone the main council offices on 01926 410410, email contactus@warwickdc.gov.uk or write to us at:

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An Equality Impact Assessment on this policy was undertaken on 9th October 2013 and will be reviewed on 9th October 2016.