

Thurrock Council
Housing Strategy
2022-2027

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Foreword

Everyone should have access to a safe, stable, secure and suitable home.

This Housing Strategy sets Thurrock Council's direction and ambitions for housing support and services for the next five years. Through this strategy, the council aims to provide a housing service that not only delivers on its targets but does so in the most human and empathetic way.

Crucially, this strategy delivers a new vision and key principles that truly place residents at the centre of all that we do. It aims to minimise bureaucracy, increase flexibility and focus more on what matters to residents.

Thurrock Council is on your side.

The council will work over the next five years and into the future to deliver housing support and services that are fit for purpose for families and individuals in the borough.

We are committed to effectively ending the need for any Thurrock resident to experience rough sleeping in our borough and will see to understand the true need for accommodation for Thurrock residents, delivering homes that people will be proud of accordingly.

We will prioritise and protect residents' safety in their homes and neighbourhoods, whether they live in a council-owned home or in the private sector, and we will work hard to ensure that all residents are empowered to have their voices heard through meaningful engagement.

I'm delighted with what our teams have managed to achieve over the past two years, despite the challenges faced.

119 new council-owned homes have been handed over and let, the number of families in out-of-borough temporary accommodation placements is at its lowest in over three years and ever-closer work between the housing service and other council departments means that more support and positive outcomes are being delivered for those who are most vulnerable in our communities.

The actions put forward in this strategy present an opportunity to go even further, with scope for major estate regeneration to provide more genuinely affordable council-owned homes, end out-of-borough placements entirely unless for safeguarding reasons or through choice, and deliver new integrated operating models in housing and with other partners to better focus on delivering the things that matter to residents in their different localities.

I look forward to seeing the successful delivery of the aims and objectives of this strategy as those within the council work closely with residents and partners across the public, private and third sectors.

Together, we can work to ensure that every Thurrock resident will have a home that meets their needs and aspirations, serving as a foundation to support their health and wellbeing and their springboard to achieve their vision of a 'good life'.

Cllr Luke Spillman

Cabinet Member for Housing

Chapter 1 – Introduction

It is important that Thurrock Council has a document that shares the aims and ambitions of the organisation regarding housing in the borough.

The council adopted its previous Housing Strategy in 2015. It required renewal, considering changes in legislation and regulation, market trends, the impact of recent welfare reforms, and new opportunities for meeting the housing needs of Thurrock's residents. Unlike the previous strategy, it is necessary that this document also reflects the turbulence and uncertainty that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Housing Strategy addresses the range of tenures available in Thurrock – social housing, owner-occupiers, and the private rental sector. It is important to note that this strategy will consider housing need and services in the borough and the barriers residents may face with accessing safe and secure accommodation. The Housing Strategy does not analyse options or sites for housing provision.

Corporate Context

Vision and Priorities

The Housing Strategy is underpinned by Thurrock Council's vision and corporate priorities, adopted in January 2018. The council's vision is for Thurrock to be **an ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.**

Sitting alongside the vision are the three corporate priorities of People, Place and Prosperity.

People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.

This means:

- high quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
- build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
- communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

The Housing Strategy must appropriately address and meet the challenges set within this priority. Resilient partnerships across sectors and empowered communities are integral to any Housing Strategy's meaningful development and success. They will ensure that services consistently meet and reflect those who use them.

Place – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future.

This means:

- roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
- clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
- fewer public buildings with better services

While the housing service has specific responsibility for maintaining and developing homes and neighbourhoods managed by the council, this document goes beyond council-owned stock to consider all tenure types. This strategy will improve understanding of households' strengths and needs across the borough, identifying the requirements for homes and infrastructure that will support current and future Thurrock residents.

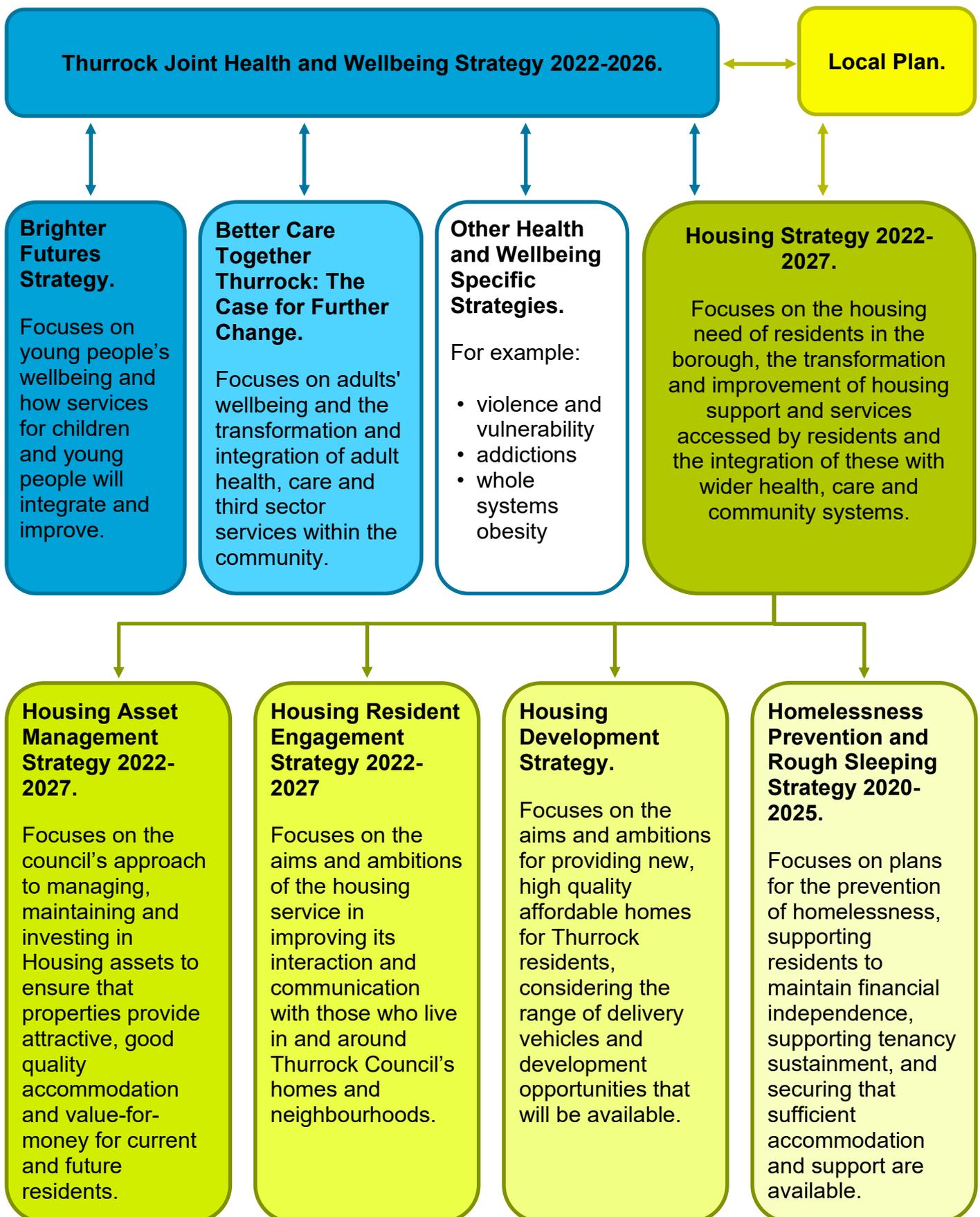
Prosperity – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.

This means:

- attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
- vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
- commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

The Housing Strategy aims to deliver opportunities for residents to achieve their aspirations, including accessing skills training with partner organisations. The strategy also seeks to expand relationships with other housing providers to increase affordable housing levels in the borough.

Strategic Context



Thurrock Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026

The Thurrock Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026 is the highest-level strategic document that describes our collective plans to improve the health and wellbeing of residents. The theme of the strategy is *Levelling the Playing Field*, and the strategy sets out high level actions to address health inequalities across the six domains of:

- healthier for longer including mental health
- building strong and cohesive communities
- person led health and care
- opportunity for all
- housing and the environment
- community safety

The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy therefore addresses the wider determinants of health including education, employment, crime and community safety, and housing, as well as healthy lifestyles and health and care. It concentrates on the 'what' and the 'why' and points to additional more detailed and topic specific strategies that deal with delivery of individual objectives (the 'how').

As housing and the environment features as a domain of health inequality in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, there is a strong link with the aims and objectives of this Housing Strategy. Both documents will drive forward positive improvements for the health and wellbeing of Thurrock residents.

Thurrock Local Plan

The local plan sets a vision and framework for the future development of Thurrock, drawn up by the local planning authority with wider engagement and consultation with the community. Once in place, the local plan becomes part of the statutory development plan. The statutory development plan for the area is the starting point for determining local planning applications.

A local plan can consist of either strategic or non-strategic policies, or a combination of the two.

The local plan addresses many issues affecting local people. There are policies that cover spatial development issues in relation to education, health, community safety, energy management, sustainable development, climate change and flood management. It also contains policies on more traditional, but important, planning activity such as housing, employment, leisure and sport, natural and historic environment, and community facilities.

Where the Housing Strategy sets strategic aims and objectives regarding housing need, the local plan supports the practicalities of providing new homes, through the identification for sites and areas where development is permitted and the creation of planning policy that meets priorities in the borough. The housing strategy will feed into the development of the new local plan, ensuring alignment.

Better Care Together Thurrock: The Case for Further Change

The *Case for Further Change* strategy sets out a collective plan to transform, improve and integrate health, care and third sector services aimed at the borough's adults and older people to improve their wellbeing. It has been developed and agreed by the Thurrock Integrated Care Alliance (TICA) and its partner organisations. Partners across Thurrock have a long history of working together to agree and deliver shared outcomes.

The *Case for Further Change* proposes a transformation from the current system architecture and ways of working to move instead towards integrated locality teams. It intends to create a single Integrated Locality Network of professionals who will be able to collaborate more easily and effectively with each other, and with residents. The overall aim is to embed the maximum amount of care and support at locality and neighbourhood level within a multi-disciplinary network of staff who can collaborate to design integrated solutions with residents rather than make onward referrals.

Backing Thurrock: A five year strategy for economic recovery, resilience and a return to growth

The Backing Thurrock Strategy sets out actions that will help the council to strengthen and grow the economy through supporting major strategic projects such as the Thames Freeport, improving skills within the workforce, helping businesses to become more productive and competitive and delivering economic infrastructure. It a key element of the council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alongside the Local Plan, *Backing Thurrock* will form the strategic framework to drive the borough's return to growth and has been developed in collaboration with public, private, and voluntary sector organisations.

It aims to shape a strong economy where residents and businesses are helped to focus on their strengths and adapt to take advantage of new opportunities such as the Thames Freeport as growth resumes. Priorities include green growth, continued investment in broadband and helping the most vulnerable in the community tackle issues, develop their skills and find work.

South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2022

This document provides an assessment of housing need in Thurrock in partnership with neighbouring authorities. It identifies the scale and mix of housing and the range of tenures that the local population is likely to need over the duration of the Local Plan period. It allows the council to understand household and population projections and the requirements for distinct types of housing, including affordable housing and those that will meet the needs of diverse groups.

Healthy Housing for the Third Age: Improving Older People's Health through Housing – Annual Public Health Report 2018/2019

Housing is widely accepted to be a key determinant of health and can impact positively and negatively on an individual's physical and mental health, in turn affecting the demand for and use of health and social care resources. The annual public health report from 2018/2019 aimed to answer the following questions for the population aged 65+:

- What impact will demographic change have on the needs for new and existing housing stock across all tenures in the next 20 years?

- What types of housing do our elderly population want and what are the impacts of choosing to move to a home more suitable for later life?
- When considering a move to more suitable housing, what would make the option attractive to our elderly population?
- What impacts does housing have on health and how can we enhance the positives and mitigate against the negatives? And how can we ensure they are better understood by those affected, thereby enabling them to better care for themselves?

Youth Violence and Vulnerability: The Crime Paradox and a Public Health Response – Annual Public Health Report 2019/2020

The 2019/2020 annual public health report focused on the issue of serious youth violence and urban street gang activity, using the Public Health Approach methodology to identify and address the vulnerabilities of the young people concerned. It considered issues such as:

- serious youth violence against the person including assault, serious assault, actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, stabbing/knife crime and gun crime and street robbery
- urban street gangs including gang related violent crime and drug related crime
- local drugs markets
- county lines
- child criminal exploitation through gangs

Collaborative Communities Framework

Thurrock's *Collaborative Communities Framework* encapsulates our strengths and assets-based approach to how we work with communities. Co-produced via our *Stronger Together* partnership over three years, the framework sets out how we will work and enable our communities to co-design and influence decisions, address their own challenges and realise their own ambitions. It recognises the importance of the council (and partners) reducing the red-tape that often hinders community-led action, devolving power and enabling different ways of working so that communities alongside statutory partners and the third sector are better enabled to achieve locally determined outcomes and outcomes that make a significant impact on the individual's quality of life.

Opportunity for all: Single Equality Scheme and Corporate Equality Framework

This framework sets out the council's commitment to helping to build pride, responsibility and respect with residents and employees, promoting equality and embracing the diversity of Thurrock's communities.

Chapter 2 – Vision, Principles, Aims and Objectives

Housing Vision

Every Thurrock resident will have access to a safe, secure, suitable, and affordable home that meets their needs and aspirations, serving as a foundation to support their health and wellbeing.

Residents will be supported at home and in their local area through connected services, neighbourhoods, localities, and communities to achieve their vision of a 'good life'.

Housing and health are intrinsically linked. Access to a safe, secure, stable, warm, and affordable home will provide people with a solid foundation upon which they can better protect their health and support their wellbeing. If a home is lacking any of these factors, it will have a detrimental impact on the physical health, mental health, and general wellbeing of all those in the household.

A safe home can mean many things, such as being hazard free, or maintained in line with compliancy measures such as gas servicing and electrical testing. A safe home goes beyond physical maintenance and bricks and mortar; it can also relate to a resident's perception of safety in their home and in the neighbourhood or estate in which it is located.

A secure home can refer to the security of tenure, giving residents peace of mind and stability by having that solid foundation to build their vision of a good life, or it can again be considered in like with the perception of safety within the home from any outside harms.

The factors that determine a suitable home are wide ranging and tailored to the housing needs of each household. It can relate to the size, type, location, and accessibility of a property, but can also refer to the standard in which the property is kept, ensuring good quality accommodation is provided and that it remains well maintained.

The definition for an affordable home is also aligned with the specific needs and commitments of every household. Affordability of home is linked with many wider consequences, such as fuel poverty and impacts on physical and mental wellbeing

Health and wellbeing run through every aspect of this strategy. This document's strategic aims and objects are rooted in the fundamental aim of tackling health inequalities through housing to support Thurrock residents to live healthy lives.

The vision for the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 is aligned with the aims of Domain 5 – Housing and the Environment within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026, outlined below.

Fewer people will be at risk of homelessness, and everyone will have access to high quality affordable homes that meet the needs of Thurrock residents.

Homes and places in Thurrock will provide environments where everyone feels safe, healthy, connected and proud.

Housing Core Principles

This Housing Strategy has been developed in part to set the basis for a new way of working for housing support and services in Thurrock. This strategy and the new way of working follow the below eight principles:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We work in partnership with residents to understand the things that matter to them in the context of their lives and the neighbourhoods in which they live. <p>What is important to you?</p> <p>1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We work to provide people with services that are high quality, easy to access, and offer appropriate support. <p>Right time, right place and high quality</p> <p>2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will relentlessly focus on reducing health inequality. We will ensure that resources are distributed in a way that accounts for variation in need at neighbourhood level. <p>Supports health and wellbeing</p> <p>3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of resource we spend on bureaucracy is kept to a minimum ensuring maximum resources are available to provide people with the solutions they require. <p>Minimises bureaucracy</p> <p>4</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our solutions look to use the assets within neighbourhoods and do not consist only of the services we provide. <p>Local, strength based solutions</p> <p>5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We empower resident facing staff to make decisions in the context of each resident they serve rather than being constrained by thresholds and <i>one size fits all</i> service specifications. <p>Doesn't break the law and meets statutory duties</p> <p>6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are flexible enough to respond and adapt delivery to changes in individual, neighbourhood and place circumstances <p>Flexible and adaptable</p> <p>7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility for housing is shared between individuals, neighbourhoods, our workforce and partners. We do <i>'with'</i>, not <i>'to'</i>. We constantly co-design and co-produce. <p>Partnership working and collaborations</p> <p>8</p>

Housing Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives set out in this strategy will support the council in achieving its housing vision. They also align with and support the work and actions identified within the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy as well as the Better Care Together Thurrock: The Case for Further Change strategy.

Deliver Housing Support and Services:

- embed a person-centred approach to housing support and services
- develop locality and neighbourhood models for integrated housing services

Meet Housing Need:

- identify and provide the right homes for Thurrock based on household need
- address the housing affordability crisis in Thurrock
- prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping in Thurrock
- deliver sustainable estate and housing regeneration
- review the model of sheltered housing provision

Protect Resident Safety:

- improve warmth, safety, and standards in private sector homes
- invest in and maintain quality council-owned homes
- strengthen community safety and prevent anti-social behaviour
- tackle domestic and sexual abuse and violence
- support vulnerable adults and children
- improve estate standards

Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment:

- improve resident satisfaction and access to information
- strengthen, integrate and diversify community and resident engagement

Chapter 3 – Background and Context

Legislative and Regulatory Framework

The Housing Strategy has been developed within and reflects current legislation and regulation.

Legislation

Thurrock Council has many housing duties and responsibilities, with only some of these relating to its role as a social housing provider. The council has duties towards homelessness prevention and relief, enforcing property standards and licensing in the private rental sector, and strategic assessments of the borough's current and future housing needs.

At the time of writing this strategy, there a number of new acts and proposed bills that will affect the way that housing support and services are provided during the expected lifetime of this strategy.

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Domestic Abuse Act aims to raise awareness and understanding about the impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families. It intends to further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice. It also aims to strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies.

Fire Safety Act 2021

The Fire Safety Act places additional duties on responsible persons for multi-occupancy residential buildings, with the legal responsibility of proactively identifying potentially dangerous external wall systems and other structural issues and putting in place measures to deal with them. Responsible persons must make sure that they are up to date with government guidance regarding dealing with dangerous external wall systems and, where necessary, that they engage with competent fire safety professionals to make sure the steps they are taking are suitable and sufficient to deal with the risks posed.

Building Safety Bill

The objective of the Building Safety Bill is to strengthen the overall regulatory system for building safety. It aims to establish a comprehensive new building safety regime concerning the design, construction, and occupation of higher-risk buildings. It aims to achieve this by ensuring there is greater accountability and responsibility for the design and construction of buildings, as well as throughout the lifecycle of buildings.

Social Housing Regulation Bill

The Social Housing Regulation Bill aims to deliver against the commitments made in the social housing white paper for those who live in poor quality social housing. It makes provision for residents to be given performance information so landlords can be held to account and aims to ensure that when residents make a complaint, landlords take quick and effective action to put things right.

In general, new legislation, and in particular new regulation, bring new duties, responsibilities, and burdens on the council. This can pose a risk due to the need to understand and implement measures correctly. Such activity can cause confusion and distraction from service delivery during initial rollout and embedding, and new reporting requirements can be cumbersome and resource intensive. The effective use of technology and analytics applications can go a long way to reducing the level of manual effort required in such circumstances.

The full impact of new regulation and legislation cannot be completely understood until sometime after implementation. However, changing legislation and regulation also provide opportunities to better meet the needs of residents, and in the longer term should improve the level of service and support offered. New legislation can tackle long-standing issues that prevent positive outcomes for residents, as evidenced through the changes introduced by the Domestic Abuse Act.

The list below is not exhaustive; however, it indicates other significant legislation that set the council's housing responsibilities.

- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1996
- Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996
- Local Government Act 2000
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Housing Act 2004
- Equality Act 2006
- Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
- Localism Act 2011
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Housing and Planning Act 2016
- Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Homes Fit for Human Habitation Act 2018

Regulation

At present, the Regulator of Social Housing has set four consumer standards and will intervene where failure to adhere to the standards has caused or would risk causing serious harm to tenants. As a social housing provider, the council must adhere to these standards.

The four consumer standards are:

- Homes Standard
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Tenancy Standard
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

The Regulator of Social Housing has also set three economic standards. However only the rent standard is currently applicable to the council as a local authority. This standard establishes the maximum weekly social and affordable rents that social landlords can charge.

There are current proposals to introduce a Social Housing Regulation Bill, which would deliver changes to the consumer regulation of social housing. It would strengthen the accountability of

landlords for providing safe homes, quality services and treating residents with respect. It would also implement some specific changes to the economic regulation of social housing. These are likely to be introduced during the lifetime of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027.

National Context

The housing landscape is ever-changing, impacted by alterations to government policy, periods of economic change, noteworthy events in the housing sector and other national influences.

Whilst Thurrock does have localised challenges, some of which are outlined in the next section, the strategic approach towards housing in the borough is equally affected by the national context.

The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper

In late 2020 the Government published its social housing white paper, The Charter for Social Housing Residents. Within this document, the Government set out its intentions to ensure that residents in social housing are safe, listened to, live in good quality homes, and have access to redress when required.

The charter outlines the following seven elements that every social housing resident should be able to expect:

- to be safe in your home
- to know how your landlord is performing
- to have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly
- to be treated with respect
- to have your voice heard by your landlord
- to have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
- to be supported to take your first step into ownership

Further to establishing these aspects, the Government announced plans to strengthen the Regulator of Social Housing. It aims to empower the regulator to be proactive in monitoring and enforcing the consumer standards that social housing landlords are held to, and requiring landlords to:

- be transparent about their performance and decision-making so that tenants and the regulator can hold them to account
- put things right when they go wrong
- listen to tenants through effective engagement

Whilst the white paper outlines these intentions, the timelines for implementing all the policies and measures announced in the document remain unclear. However, there is now progress regarding the Social Housing Regulation Bill, and steps have been taken regarding building safety.

It is expected that the Government will undertake periods of engagement and consultation and introduce legislation during the lifetime of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027. However, the housing service has already begun to work proactively to ensure that the council is in a strong position to meet and address the white paper proposals as more information becomes available regarding implementation.

Building and Fire Safety

The Grenfell Tower Fire on 14 June 2017 brought both fire and building safety into sharp focus for housing providers, building managers and residents of high-rise properties across the country. The tragedy triggered a wave of activity, such as tenant engagement roadshows by housing ministers, the development of a social housing green paper, and the commissioning of a review of building regulations and fire safety led by Dame Judith Hackitt.

Published in May 2018, *Building a Safer Future: Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety* set out over 50 recommendations for government to improve and strengthen regulation in the sector.

The report identified many areas of failure within the existing system. It made recommendations to introduce a new regulatory framework, strengthen enforcement powers to ensure safety, and define better the role of duty holders with responsibility for the safety of a whole building.

In addition, the report drew particular attention to the importance of engaging with residents, strategies for engagement, and ensuring that residents had access to information and involvement in decision making.

The report also highlights the strength of structured engagement through residents' associations and tenant panels and the need for cultural change in the relationship between landlords and residents.

The council's duties and obligations relating to building and fire safety are likely to be broadened in the coming months and years due to the progression of the Building Safety Bill and the commencement of the Fire Safety Act 2021. As such, the Housing Strategy must respond to these and flex with any newly introduced duties or responsibilities.

Climate and Sustainability

The Climate Change Act 2008 set a target in legislation to reduce UK emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses to net-zero by 2050. More recently, measures have been introduced to support this aim, such as the intention to phase out gas-fired boilers in new properties by 2035 and increase the use of electric vehicles across the country by mandating that all new homes must have charging points provided.

In October 2019, Thurrock Council passed a motion whereby it declared a climate emergency and set out to take urgent action to reduce its carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030. Initial plans are being developed to respond to the climate crisis by ensuring that council operations are carbon-neutral by this time. As a social housing provider with around 10,000 properties in its stock, to achieve net-zero by 2050, many significant financial and logistical challenges will need to be addressed.

COVID-19 and Housing

Concerns remain across the Housing sector that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing and homelessness has not yet fully emerged.

Initiatives such as 'Everyone In' and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, and legislation to temporarily ban evictions and extend eviction notice periods, provided some stability and security

to households during significant uncertainty throughout much of 2020 and 2021, but these were not permanent resolutions.

With these temporary protections now removed and considering growing inflation levels and household costs, there are fears of a surge of households experiencing financial hardship and, therefore, at risk of homelessness. The full extent of the impacts on the private rental sector and the broader housing market in Thurrock is uncertain; however, the Housing Strategy aims to consider these factors to adapt and respond in the event of any such spike.

Levelling-up White Paper

The Levelling-up White Paper outlines 12 'missions across four broad areas with the aim to reduce inequality and transform the UK by spreading opportunity and prosperity. These areas are:

- boosting productivity and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
- spreading opportunities and improving public services, especially in those areas where they are weakest
- restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
- empowering local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.

It also sets an aim under mission 10 that by 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas and an ambition for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest-performing areas.

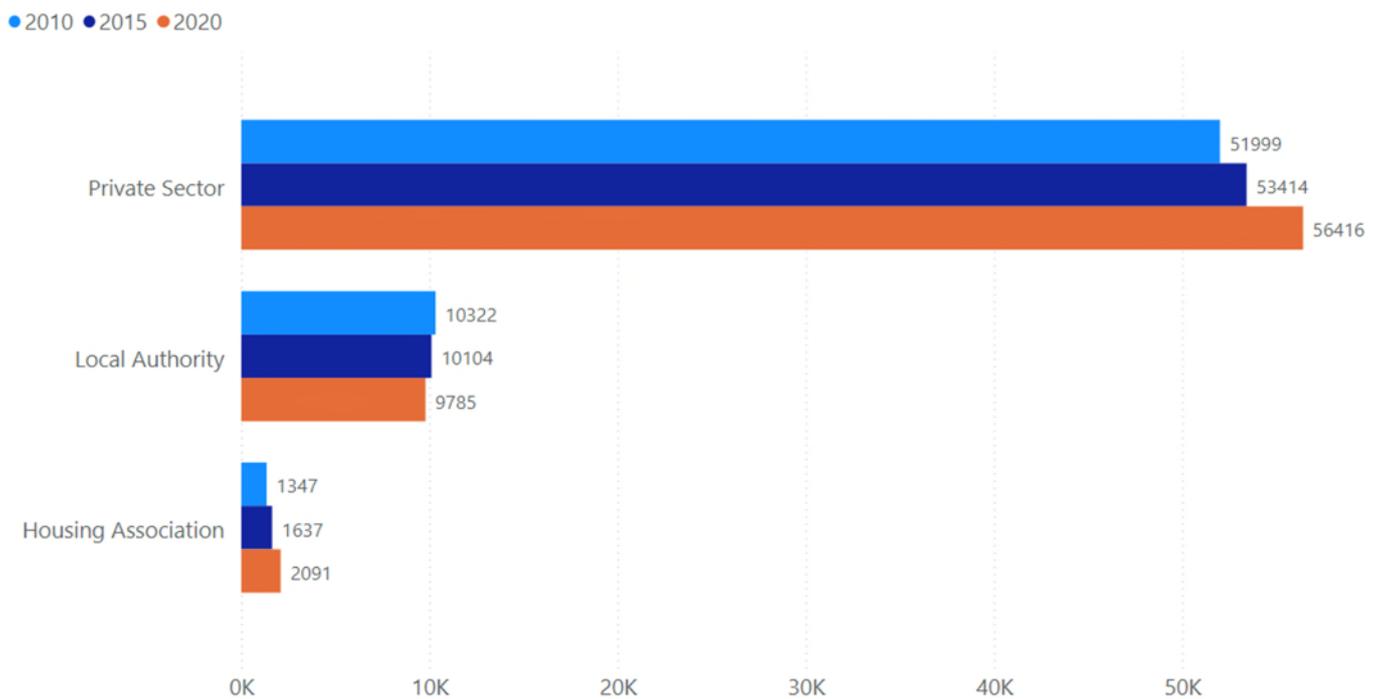
Local Context

Housing Tenure Mix in Thurrock

This section of the strategy provides information on the current housing landscape in Thurrock, setting out estimates of the tenure mix in the borough and outlining the shifting distribution of tenure types over time.

The chart below provides estimates of the number of dwellings in Thurrock, broken down by ownership type.

Number of Dwellings by Ownership Type

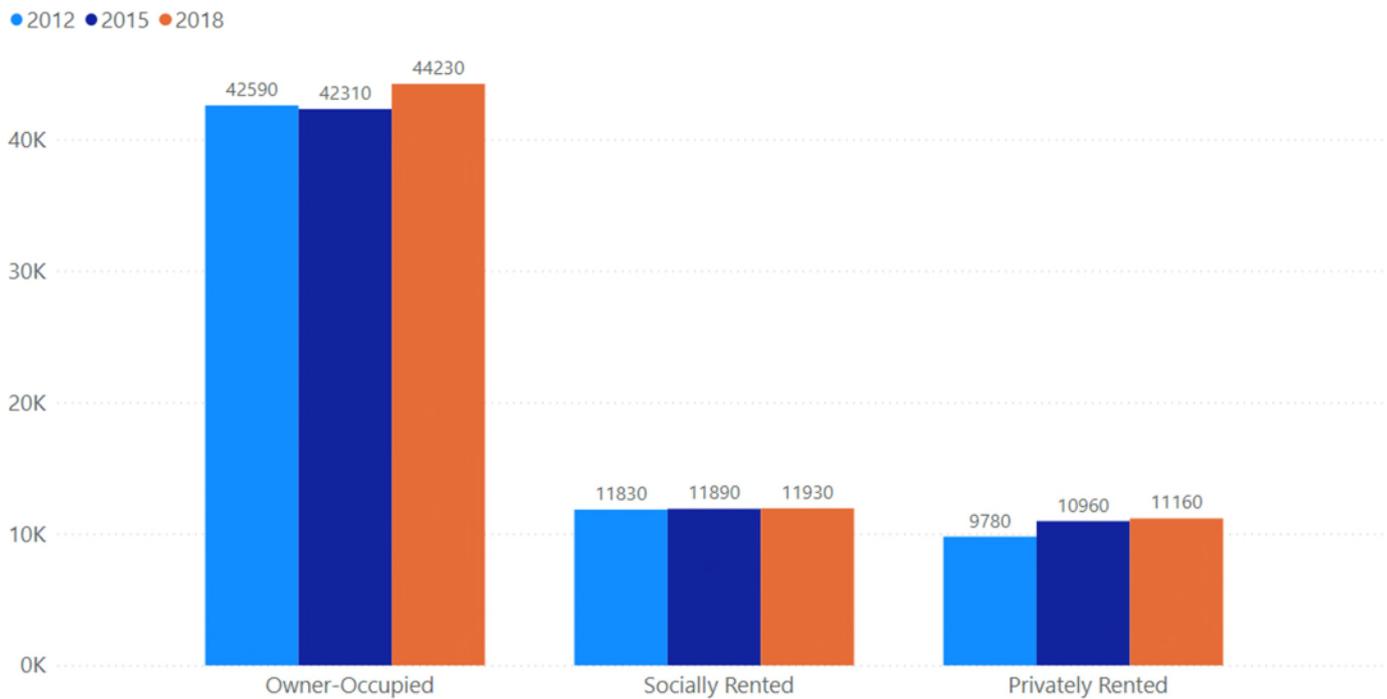


This chart illustrates a net reduction in the number of properties owned by the local authority; however, an increase can be observed in the number of properties owned by housing associations (also known as private registered providers of social housing or registered social landlords).

The chart also indicates an increase in the number of privately owned dwellings in Thurrock. These figures, published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), do not provide any details to determine which privately owned dwellings are owner-occupied or used in the private rental sector.

Alternative estimates by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicate the split between privately rented properties and those occupied by the owner. It should be noted that these are not official statistics, but they do provide an illustrative figure for comparison. In this chart, socially rented refers to the combined number of dwellings owned by the local authority and those owned by housing associations.

ONS Estimated Number of Dwellings by Tenure



These figures show that all tenures saw net increases in the number of dwellings between 2012 and 2018; however, the proportion of owner-occupied and socially rented properties fell during this period. Conversely, the proportion of properties in Thurrock being used in the private rental sector increased significantly.

Although both charts above are presented as estimates, they confirm that there has been an increase in the number of dwellings in Thurrock and appear to support the anecdotal evidence that recent years have seen an increase in the number of private rental sector properties in the borough.

During Census 2021, a range of tenure and housing-related data was collected. Once this has been published, it will be possible to reconcile these estimates against accurate figures provided through the Census activity. The ONS aim to confirm the final release schedule in February 2022.

Affordability

Affordability of accommodation in Thurrock is an ongoing challenge, both in the private rental sector and for those aiming to purchase properties.

Further detail outlining the affordability crisis in the borough is explored in Chapter 4 of this strategy.

Social Housing Provision

In Thurrock, the council is the primary provider of social housing. Based on data published by MHCLG (now DLUHC), as of 31 March 2020, it was estimated that 14.3% of dwellings in Thurrock were owned by the council, with other registered providers of social housing owning less than 3.1% of homes in the borough.

The impact of these figures means that for every 47 council-owned dwellings, there were 10 registered provider-owned dwellings, representing the fifth-lowest ratio for stock-retaining local authorities in England at the time of writing.

Although the number of registered provider-owned dwellings has been increasing over time, this imbalance has led to additional pressure and demand on Thurrock Council from households as it is seen to be the primary provider of affordable accommodation in the borough.

Thames Freeport

It was announced in October 2021 that the Thames Freeport, one of eight announced in the UK, would be able to commence operations. It is anticipated to deliver transformational change across the entire borough, creating thousands of new jobs and attracting substantial investment into Thurrock over the next 25 years.

The successful delivery of the Thames Freeport in Thurrock is expected to contribute significantly to achieving wider place agenda ambitions. It will bring together physical, economic, social, and environmental renewal to improve the wellbeing of communities, provide opportunities and help ensure places are fit for the future.

The expected creation of jobs is likely to impact housing need in the local area. As the Thames Freeport develops and progress on the Local Plan continues, it is expected that this impact can be quantified, and measures identified to address housing need.

Purfleet-on-Thames

Purfleet Centre Regeneration Limited is a joint venture between Urban Catalyst and Swan Housing in partnership with Thurrock Council to regenerate over 140 acres to create Purfleet-on-Thames.

Developed on healthy town principles, Purfleet-on-Thames will create a new waterfront destination on the River Thames; an international create hub and high quality new residential with place making at its core. The vision for Purfleet-on-Thames includes:

- A state-of-the-art film and TV studio facility and related creative industry hub
- Attractive new waterfront commercial and retail space
- Up to 2,850 new homes, including significant health and education facilities
- Community facilities
- Leisure uses
- Upgraded and additional public transport facilities

Lower Thames Crossing

National Highways proposes building a new Lower Thames Crossing that will include a major highway through Thurrock. Project proposals include two new 2.5-mile tunnels under the River Thames, 14.5 miles of new road and the construction and alteration of structures, including bridges, buildings, utilities, and tunnels.

The proposals for the Lower Thames Crossing have been assessed as directly and substantially compromising the ability to meet the need for new housing in Thurrock in a sustainable manner. It

would lead to the direct loss of approximately 20 existing dwellings, and it is estimated that 1,400 homes would be affected by blight.

The impact on local housing would not only be affected upon completion of the project. During the construction phases of the Lower Thames Crossing, there will be the need for accommodation for over 900 workers involved with the construction of the northern parts of the project in Thurrock. It is expected that this need would be met through a combination of rented properties visitor accommodation such as hotels and owner-occupied homes. This would significantly increase demand and may negatively impact affordability and supply for Thurrock residents and may be a matter of significant concern should the Lower Thames Crossing construction project be awarded a Development Consent Order.

Chapter 4 – Deliver Housing Support and Services

This chapter proposes a reframing of the approach taken to support households interacting with the council. Instead of viewing a set of 'problems' requiring resolution by disconnected teams, the Housing Strategy encourages a strengths-based 'whole person' approach, connected within a wider system that includes adult social care, children's services, public health, NHS partners, the wider community, voluntary and faith sector, and existing assets within the community, that can all positively support people to live healthily and well.

Embed a person-centred approach to housing support and services

Context

Thurrock residents approach and interact with council services, delivery partners and other organisations regarding a range of housing-related matters every day. Whilst all will aim to help achieve positive outcomes or resolve any presented issues that fall within their defined remit, the current approach can create barriers to success as few challenges can be appropriately addressed by any one party in isolation.

Homelessness, for example, cannot be addressed in Thurrock solely by the housing service of the council – it requires far greater collaboration and partnership. It also requires all those working alongside individuals and households to see 'whole human beings' with their strengths, which may have further needs beyond the lack of a safe, secure or suitable home.

This strength-based 'whole person' approach should be embraced and adopted by those working with residents in the borough, considering all the elements and factors that may have contributed to their experience.

Rather than responding to people approaching the council as a collection of fragmented teams and services, each trying to tackle their own 'problem', it is intended that we move in a direction where parties are connected and operating within a wider system beyond traditional organisational boundaries. Housing forms one part of this, alongside others such as adult social care, children's services, public health, NHS partners, the wider community, voluntary and faith sector, and existing assets within the community.

When viewing an individual or household through the lens of a wider system, greater opportunities are available for the coordination of more holistic approaches to support relating to their housing need and other personal circumstances, which also complement their strengths.

A key focus within the housing service and with those the council engaged with in the development of this strategy is tenancy sustainment – supporting those who may find it difficult to maintain their tenancy or risk losing their home for whatever reason. The factors affecting the health of a tenancy can be complex. A 'whole person' approach adopted within a wider housing system allows the opportunity to explore underlying causes for the vulnerability of the tenancy and work together to implement appropriate early interventions to reduce the risk of that household reaching the point of crisis.

As teams and services operate within this broader system, every interaction with a resident or household will present an opportunity for continuous engagement, learning, and improvement. This can be in the context of supporting those individuals by learning about the barriers preventing positive outcomes and designing ways to overcome them, or by identifying systemic issues through shared experience and practice that would require wider resolution.

Impact

The current system fragmentation impacts the ability to work with residents and reach positive health, wellbeing and housing outcomes, ultimately affecting resident aspirations to achieve their vision of a good life.

The impact of current ways of siloed working explored above impacts upon residents achieving what matters to them due to referrals, handoffs, thresholds, and inefficiency in existing processes.

This inefficiency and disconnection between those working to support Thurrock residents leads to a greater number of uncoordinated interventions, increases levels of failure demand and further underlines ineffective uses of available resources.

Available support provision is currently based on previous professional experience, rather than fully considering the needs and strengths of individuals or what the community is available to offer without reliance on formal services.

By moving in a direction where support and services exist within a person-centred system offering a truly 'human' approach, residents will be empowered to be able to achieve more of what matters to them and reach their version of a good life.

This approach will improve working relationships, knowledge sharing and positive outcomes across the system.

Support will be provided in collaboration with the community and focuses first and foremost on what the community can offer. Residents will maximise opportunities to stay as healthy as possible, require fewer interventions from services and achieving better outcomes as a result.

Importantly, residents will be able to find the right solution for them, first time and in the right place, mitigating against the risks and detrimental impacts of crisis and driving down the cost of failure demand experienced by individuals and organisations.

Recent action

Many of the most successful areas of transformation in Thurrock are already operating using person-centred system principles. These include the council's Local Area Coordinators, Community Led Solutions, Community Builders, Wellbeing Teams, and Integrated Primary and Community Mental Health Care.

These teams are delivering better outcomes for residents by freeing frontline staff from pre-defined service specifications, KPIs and bureaucracy. Instead, they are empowered to co-design bespoke solutions with residents, responding to individual context.

The housing service has started to develop and embed person-centred approaches into the way staff work with and support residents, including pilots in the Housing Operations and Housing Solutions service areas.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
We will embed the housing core principles and person-centred approach to housing services in service provision in order to provide tailored and bespoke support to residents	<p>We will launch test and learn pilots in the housing operations and housing solutions services to develop the person-centred approach to housing</p> <p>We will take the learning from these pilots to inform and implement a plan to embed person-centred principles across the wider housing service</p>	<p>Residents will be experience support that is bespoke, tailored and co-designed to meet their specific circumstances and needs</p> <p>Residents will benefit from housing services that focus on prioritising the things that matter in order for residents to achieve their vision of a good life above all else</p>
We will reduce bureaucracy in order to deliver outcomes that matter to residents at pace	We will minimise delays due to service eligibility thresholds and management decision-making wherever possible by devolving decision making authority and accountability to resident facing staff	Residents will receive quicker outcomes, removing the frustration and anxiety experienced through protracted referral or decision-making pathways
We will adopt a whole system approach to supporting residents in order to reduce fragmentation and duplication of services	We will explore the system from a housing perspective through the test and learn pilots. We will use this learning to identify where duplication exists in the wider system and find opportunities for where effective coordination can lead to better outcomes for residents	Residents will experience greater opportunities for the coordination of more holistic approaches to support relating to their housing need and other personal circumstances which also complement their strengths

Develop locality and neighbourhood models for integrated housing services

Context

Housing support, much like public services more broadly, is often fragmented into specific areas that each focus on resolving single 'problems'. However, people want to be recognised and supported by a system that views them as a complex individual aiming to achieve their vision of a good life.

Thresholds and eligibility criteria exist across the public sector, and housing support and services are no exception. Support may only be provided to those identified as 'eligible', and that support is often standardised and focussed solely on one single need, determined on a borough-wide level.

People are likely to have multiple interconnected needs that would benefit from the support of multiple teams or organisations, but the current approach to obtaining that support is often lengthy, fragmented and features with elements of duplication. Support is often provided through formal services when community organisations and assets may already exist to be able to meet these needs.

During the time that an individual attempts to navigate referral pathways and evidence their eligibility, it is highly likely that the need for housing support will become greater. This in turn will exacerbate any other connected or related support need, driving the individual towards crisis rather than prevention or early intervention.

This way of working increases rather than manages demand. It increases bureaucracy, costs, delays and wasted resource and has negative impacts on those seeking support as well as those providing it.

Impact

Thurrock requires a system that people can access at any point, mostly from within their local community, to get the support they require. This support must be coordinated and focused on achieving what matters most to them. Those providing a service must work together in the community and with the community to deploy resources effectively, overcome organisational boundaries, navigate unhelpful process and bureaucracy, and deliver an integrated bespoke solution. Resource must be used collectively, with solutions provided incorporating community assets, technology and provision that is creative and diverse.

The *Better Care Together Thurrock: Case for Further Change* strategic document seeks to address this issue, primarily from a health and care perspective, however it combines this with a broader view to also include other areas that can affect (or can be affected) by these needs. One such area relates to housing.

The *Case for Further Change* proposes a transformation from the current system architecture and ways of working to move instead towards integrated locality teams. It intends to create a single Integrated Locality Network of professionals who will be able to collaborate more easily and effectively with each other, and with residents. The overall aim is to embed the maximum amount of care and support at locality and neighbourhood level within a multi-disciplinary network of staff who can collaborate to design integrated solutions with residents rather than make onward referrals.

The *Case for Further Change* suggests the incorporation of specific housing services into these Integrated Locality Networks, and the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 supports this intention.

Recent action

Thurrock has a team of Local Area Coordinators (LACs), each aligned to specific localities and neighbourhoods within the borough. The primary role of the LAC is to develop a detailed understanding of community assets, networks, services, organisations and groups within their area, but also more broadly across the borough. LACs then work with residents to find pragmatic solutions to problems, drawing on these community resources before considering commissioned or statutory services.

The service always starts with the question “What does a good life mean to you?”, making it holistic and bespoke. Instead of simply assessing or referring residents into services they:

- invest enough time in understanding what a good life looks like to the individual or family, and how they could get there
- help people to build their own capacity and connections, so that they can stay strong and independent
- build new community connections or capacity where they do not exist

LACs work in a truly integrated way and are able to navigate across services and organisations to find solutions and overcome barriers with the aim of preventing people from reaching crisis.

Community Led Support (CLS) is an approach to social work that means that social work teams build networks with other professionals within a specific locality so that they can be mobilised to provide a joined-up response, rather than one that purely considers adult social care needs.

Teams are based in the community and aligned with the four Primary Care Network (PCN) areas. These teams work solely within their locality, based out of a number of different community settings.

The approach represents a radical departure from traditional social work models based on assessing deficits and prescribing commissioned services.

CLS has been successful with numerous case studies showing how people have been effectively supported in a different way. Early successes have included reduced waiting times, improved access – with regular 'drop in' sessions being organised close to where people live and working with other professionals and organisations in the area, including community-based groups and the community, voluntary and faith sector, to develop innovative and streamlined ways of delivering what people required and how they required it.

The learning from LAC and CLS has provided a blueprint for redesigned local integrated care and support. Such approaches do not rely on thresholds and eligibility before they help someone. They identify what the person requires to live a good life, and in doing so, they help to put in place a plan that focuses on preventing that person's health and wellbeing from declining.

Both CLS and LAC initiatives have shown the power of place-based working and of taking time to have conversations with people that focus on what matters to them. This has led to very different solutions being developed, many of which have prevented and reduced the need for services or helped to reduce the reliance on a service response.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
We will develop a neighbourhood model for housing services in order to better focus on delivering what matters to residents in different localities	<p>We will support the ambition of the <i>Case for Further Change</i> by bringing housing together at locality level and will empower front line staff from across housing to form relationships and networks across the system, to work together with residents to design and deliver meaningful, personal and holistic solutions</p> <p>We will create opportunities to pool budgets and resources, simplify existing complex decision pathways and reduce the number of referrals made by offering support directly</p>	Residents will be supported by housing staff with an understanding of local priorities, networks and assets, improving the range of positive outcomes that can be delivered
We will expand housing locality working into the Integrated Locality Network in order to collaborate more effectively with residents and other professionals	We will embed housing support and services within the Integrated Locality Networks encompassing a wide range of health, care and third sector partners, allowing staff to collaborate with each other and with residents to co-design bespoke integrated solutions rather than making referrals	Residents will experience improved integration between related but historically disjointed services, increasing and improving access to information and sources of support
We will expand the knowledge and skills of housing staff in order to better support residents	<p>We will expand the knowledge of housing officers relating to health, care and social needs to improve the support that can be offered directly to residents within localities</p> <p>We will provide training and share knowledge relating to housing services and support with others across the Integrated Locality Networks to strengthen the shared understanding of all partners</p>	Residents will be better supported by housing staff with broad knowledge and skills that are able to directly help with matters relating to health and care, and which can navigate the wider system to identify the most appropriate course of action

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will create new Community Case worker 'blended roles' able to co-design integrated, bespoke solutions with residents</p>	<p>We will use test and learn pilots to create new 'Community Caseworker roles' that are able to deliver a wider range of solutions to residents, with skills traditionally delivered in silos by different teams within Adult Social Care, NHS functions, housing, debt and the community, voluntary and faith sector</p>	<p>Residents with more complex problems that traditionally needed input from multiple different teams and services will find it easy to access a bespoke solution that genuinely solves their problem</p>

Chapter 5 – Meet Housing Need

Identifying and understanding housing need can be complex, and any unmet need can have a significant and lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of people. This chapter sets an approach to use a range of information sources to build an accurate understanding of current and future housing need, creating the evidence base for directing housing development.

This chapter considers how the council can explore, understand, and address the diverse housing needs of the borough's population. It also shares residents' priorities regarding the standard of homes in Thurrock and how homes can be developed and improved in the borough.

The development and quality of homes have direct relationships with the health and wellbeing of individuals. The adherence to suitable space standards, ample provision of affordable housing and the inclusion of appropriate green and open space in new developments will positively affect the lives of residents who will live there.

Identify and provide the right homes for Thurrock based on household need

Context

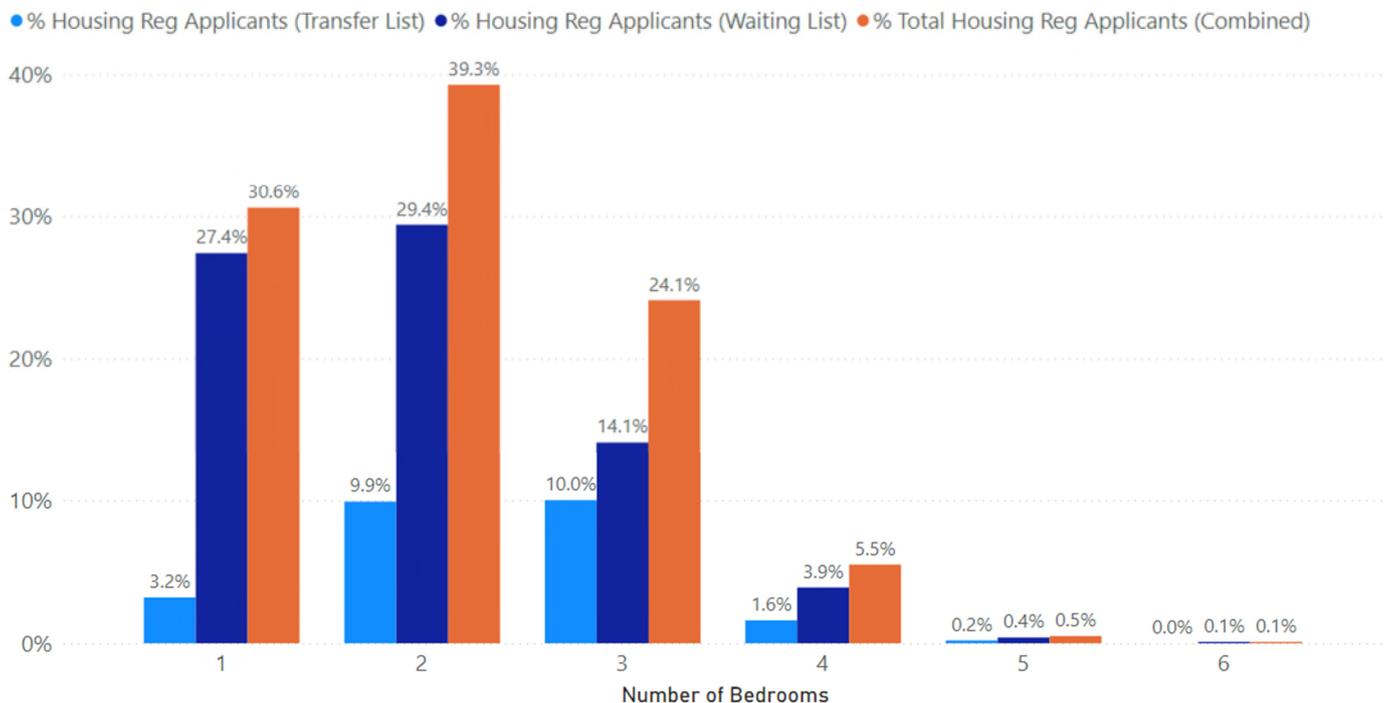
Every household has a housing need that is aligned to and reflective of their circumstances at that point in time. Housing need can relate to:

- property affordability
- the number of bedrooms required by a household
- property location
- any adaptations, alterations, or specific property types to ensure accessibility
- care or support services
- independent living

During the engagement and development of this strategy, many residents were concerned that the right types of accommodation were insufficiently available to meet their needs. Affordability was cited as one of the most significant barriers to securing accommodation within Thurrock with growing inflation, increasing household costs and the continuation of welfare reforms placing incomes under pressure. Residents also highlighted difficulties in accessing adapted or adaptable properties in the borough.

The chart below presents a snapshot of general needs housing need by property size. It includes applicants that have placed at least one bid in the past two years or have had their application registered in the past two years.

General Needs Housing Need by Number of Bedrooms



Based on the council's housing register data, the greatest demand is for two-bedroom properties, followed by one-bedroom properties.

The most recent Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was produced in 2017. A SHMA is a technical study intended to help the council's planning and housing services to understand how many homes will be needed during the assessment period – in this case, between 2014 and 2037.

The approach to produce a SHMA uses demographic modelling to estimate how the population and household profile could change, assuming that housing needs are met in full by estimating size and type of housing needed based on tendencies of existing households. It provides a separate calculation of affordable housing need, accounting for backlog and newly arising need and considering the role of different products, like First Homes.

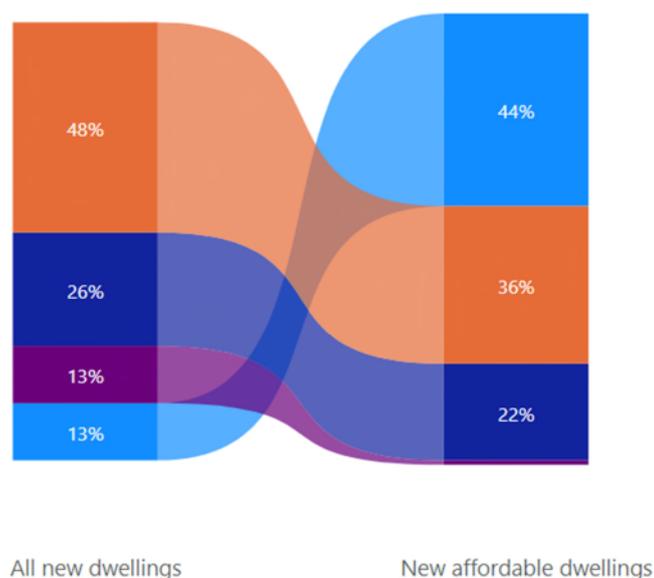
Finally, the SHMA gives specific consideration for the needs of different groups identified, such as:

- older people
- people with disabilities
- families
- young people
- privately renting households
- self-builders

The 2017 assessment indicated an objectively assessed need of 1074 to 1381 properties per annum across all tenures for Thurrock between 2014 and 2037, identifying a net annual affordable housing need of 472 new dwellings. The proportions for the required property sizes identified through the SHMA are shared in the chart below.

SHMA Required Property Sizes by Number of Bedrooms

● 1 Bed ● 2 Bed ● 3 Bed ● 4 Bed+

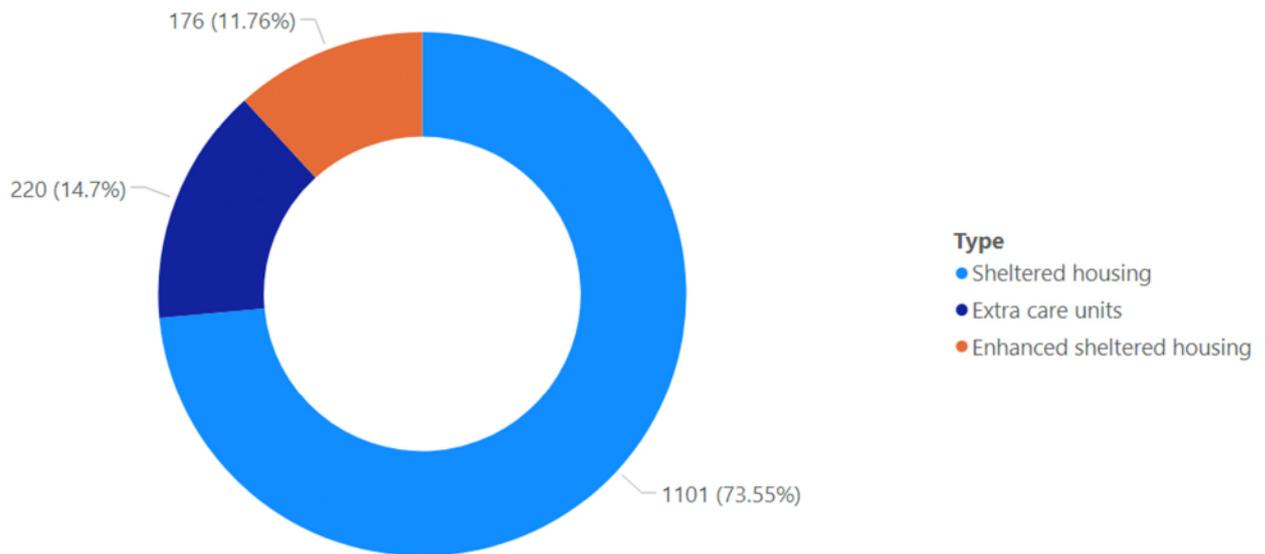


There are significant variations between the proportions suggested by the existing SHMA and the data available for the council's housing register. It should be noted that the SHMA considers the housing need for the entire current and future population of Thurrock and recommends that the

council continues to monitor the number of bedrooms required by households in priority need on the housing registers.

The SHMA identified the potential need for additional specialist older persons housing in Thurrock over the assessment period, including residential care housing. The total requirements across the assessment period for each type of specialist older persons' housing are presented below, alongside the average number of dwellings needed per annum.

SHMA Specialist Older Persons Housing Requirements (2014-2037)



Feedback during the development of this strategy and evidence presented above identify concerns with regards to affordability and availability of homes for Thurrock residents, in relation to home ownership as well as property rental. Residents also shared views regarding the availability of new homes that are adapted or adaptable for accessibility requirements.

There is a clear need for good quality, sustainable and affordable housing to be provided in the borough. It is key to the wider growth agenda, enabling residents to live healthy and well lives and means that local residents are available to take up the new employment opportunities created by growth in the borough.

As a social housing provider, the council has a pipeline of future development projects aligned with identified local need.

Following the abolition of the HRA borrowing cap in October 2018 Thurrock Council, as a local authority with an HRA, is no longer constrained by government controls over borrowing for housebuilding. Instead, the council is now able to borrow against their expected rental income.

Additional flexibilities regarding the use of Right to Buy sales receipts were introduced in March 2021, including included raising the proportion of project costs that can be funded from the receipts from 30% to 40%, permitting their use in developing shared ownership homes, and extending the period by which they must be used by from three to five years after receipt.

These changes mean that there will be wider scope to fund the development of new council-owned homes, and there is currently a pipeline of future projects aligned with identified local need that can now be taken forward.

Land that is suitable for these types of developments could include:

- plots of available land in areas where there is existing social housing
- smaller developments in mixed development areas on existing council land
- redevelopment of existing housing stock where due to its age or condition will need to be redeveloped – this can include both small-scale development and large-scale housing regeneration projects

Given the demand for smaller sized properties as evidenced within this strategy, much of the focus of council-owned developments in the near future is anticipated to primarily be one and two-bedroom homes; however, there will be a mix of homes including three and four-bedroom developments for growing families which can in turn make smaller homes available to be relet where the new occupiers are moving from an existing council-owned property.

Thurrock Regeneration Ltd (TRL) offers another route for the provision of new, high-quality housing across the borough. As a development company set-up and funded by loans from Thurrock Council, it can deliver properties for market sale, private rent, affordable rent and shared ownership, and then reinvest any profits into further housing development or to support services. TRL can support brownfield redevelopment and ensure that sites can be taken forward where other developers may be deterred by feasibility by accessing funding via partners such as the local enterprise partnership, the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA), and Homes England.

However, the council cannot meet the needs of all households in Thurrock in isolation. As such, work is needed to encourage and attract other registered providers of social housing and housing developers to construct homes in the borough, either directly or through joint ventures with the council, to meet the needs evidenced through local analysis and in the strategic housing market assessment.

Impact

There is an evidenced shortfall in the number of new dwellings in Thurrock compared to the identified need in the 2017 SHMA. Based on forecast need of 1074 to 1381 properties per annum since 2014, between 2016 and 2020 the cumulative total number of new dwellings required would be in the region of 5370 to 6905.

The DLUHC figures shared in the local context section of this strategy estimate that the number of dwellings in Thurrock increased by 3137 during this period. This is between 42% and 55% lower than required.

It is likely that the data provided in the SHMA update in 2017 is not accurately representative of present need given the length of time that has passed and the ambitious economic development and growth plans that are now in place for Thurrock; however, anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of new properties required per annum is unlikely to be lower than the previously published recommendations.

This undersupply compared to demand is one factor in the significant challenges for residents to find and securing suitable accommodation in Thurrock.

Demand that exceeds supply contributes to the rising levels of housing unaffordability within Thurrock. In the private rental sector high demand has led to landlords seeking to increase rental costs, whereas in the property market demand has raised asking prices, putting first time buyers under further pressure due to the requirement for larger deposits.

This undersupply has also led to fewer homes being developed to allow overcrowded families and those with adult children living at home to move into a property that is the right size for their needs and has also impacted upon the supply new homes built with adaptability in mind.

Pressures exist not only in the private sector but also within social housing. Demand far outstrips supply for the council's stock and there is a disproportionately small amount of housing association properties within the borough as an alternative.

Recent action

The development of a new SHMA is currently underway to update the understanding of local housing need, jointly commissioned by the local authorities across South Essex. This piece of work is anticipated to identify the housing need for Thurrock until 2040 and will guide the development of the new Thurrock Local Plan.

The council does have a pipeline of new build schemes, and these plans are informed by regular reviews of the council's Housing Register to provide an indicator of social and affordable housing demand, including any additional support needs or property adaptations that may be required.

This information has also been used to guide developments undertaken by other registered providers of social housing, collectively working to increase the number of affordable properties available to local residents in Thurrock.

Focusing on a particular subset of housing need, the 2018 Thurrock Council Annual Public Health Report considered the topic of older people's health and housing. Through the development of this document, partners, and stakeholders from across the council came together to explore and demonstrate the link between good housing and health, and the significant role that the home plays in the lives of older people.

An affordability joint strategic needs assessment has progressed well in partnership with the council's Public Health team. The detailed findings and understanding provided by that assessment will be taken forward as actions of this strategy. They will feature alongside the development of a 'Thurrock Affordability' standard that considers local costs of living, local income, and housing market prices.

Over the past two years, 119 new council-owned homes have been built in the borough. In the 2020-21 financial year 29 new homes were provided at the Alma Court development in South Grays and a further 53 new homes constructed at Heathlyn Close and Claudian Way in Chadwell St Mary.

Case Study – Healthlyn Close/Claudian Way New Build Development

The Healthlyn Close/Claudian Way development project delivered 53 homes arranged around a new focal point for Chadwell St Mary.

The site for the development was located on an open green space in the centre of Chadwell St Mary, near the much larger Orsett Heath. It was well located regarding existing schools, public transport, and community facilities.

Most residents that attended engagement events that the council held agreed that the Claudian Way site was suitable for residential development and favoured an approach which included bungalows and a small mixture of flats and family houses. This approach met the needs of the local community and gave local residents confidence that they would not be overlooked by the proposed new buildings.

A mixture of property sizes and types were provided at the development to respond to the differing needs of the community.

- 8x 1-bedroom flats
- 14x 2-bedroom flats
- 15x 1-bedroom bungalows
- 3x 2-bedroom bungalows
- 1x 2-bedroom wheelchair adapted bungalow
- 2x 3-bedroom wheelchair adapted bungalows
- 10x 3-bedroom houses

All homes were handed over into the council's ownership to be let at affordable rents within Local Housing Allowance rates.

A local lettings plan set out that 75% of the first offers of flats and houses within the plan would be made to current residents of Chadwell St Mary. The 21 bungalows at this site were not included in the local lettings plan as a reflection of the borough-wide need for these types of properties.

In total, 31 properties at Healthlyn Close/Claudian Way were let to existing residents of Chadwell St Mary through the local lettings plan and usual allocations process, including all the houses, over two-thirds of the flats and six of the bungalows at the development.

The remaining 21 properties were let to Thurrock residents who lived outside of the Chadwell St Mary ward, including one care leaver supported into independent accommodation.

Further to this, in 2021-22 the council let 35 properties built to HAPPI standards at Beaconsfield Place in Tilbury and two further wheelchair accessible homes in an innovative scheme at Defoe Parade in Chadwell St Mary.

Planning approval has been secured for the provision of four new council homes at Loewen Road in Chadwell St Mary and for a multi-tenure project at Culver Centre and Field in South Ockendon, to be delivered through Thurrock Regeneration Limited.

There is also an existing pipeline of proposed projects, such as the redevelopment of part of the Civic Offices site for further council-owned homes. The current number of potential dwellings on

new build projects under consideration is 504, featuring a mix of council-owned properties and other delivery approaches.

Any sites that become approved for housing development and are held within the General Fund may be offered to Thurrock Regeneration Limited, subject to Cabinet approval. Those sites will generally be required to deliver 35% affordable housing in line with planning policy with the affordable housing offered for sale to the Housing Revenue Account.

The council has also acquired over 120 existing properties from the local housing market for use within its housing stock, utilised as part of a wider plan to transform the council's temporary accommodation offer.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
We will use housing knowledge and data to influence and support the development of the Local Plan to ensure that future planning policy is representative of the needs of Thurrock residents	We will continue to support the development and delivery of the Local Plan, using a data and evidence-based approach that takes into consideration the feedback and priorities of residents	Residents will benefit from the development of planning policy that is fit for purpose, fit for the future and encourages the types of homes and community infrastructure that will provide the foundations for good lives
We will identify and understand housing need in Thurrock in order to deliver more social and affordable housing for households in the borough	<p>We will use data from the SHMA 2022 and the council's housing register, alongside engagement with residents on their experiences of living in our properties and their preferences for homes for the future to steer the development of council-owned homes and the plans of other providers of social housing in Thurrock</p> <p>We will use local letting plans for all council-led developments to safeguard that at least 75% of new homes are provided to residents with connections to the surrounding area</p>	Residents will have access to a range of new build homes that are affordable, support their housing need and that prioritise providing housing for people with an established connection to the local area

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will build homes that can respond and adapt to changing housing needs throughout life in order to ensure individuals live independently in suitable accommodation for longer</p>	<p>We will develop and implement an older persons' housing strategy that will direct the future development of council-owned housing for older people, aligned to principles such as HAPPI and Lifetime Homes, and inform the developments of others to deliver homes that align to HAPPI</p> <p>We will include accessible homes and HAPPI standards in new council-led development schemes</p>	<p>Residents will have access to housing that is adaptable and will facilitate independent living for longer, allowing households to remain settled in their home and avoiding the upheaval and disruption associated with moving home</p>
<p>We will tackle direct and indirect discrimination in order to ensure that every Thurrock resident can access suitable accommodation</p>	<p>We will examine the factors leading to discrimination in housing that limit and prevent access to accommodation and implement a plan to tackle these</p>	<p>Residents will not experience housing discrimination and will be able to secure safe, suitable and affordable accommodation</p>
<p>We will deliver and refresh the council's housing development programme in order to identify new opportunities to provide at least 500 new social homes for rent</p>	<p>We will continue to deliver homes as part of the council's housing development programme, championing high standards of design and construction on new affordable housing projects</p> <p>We will continue to identify and progress new sites for the programme pipeline with consideration to the range of delivery methods</p> <p>We will undertake regular assessments of existing and emerging housing delivery options, relating both to construction and provision to ensure that the viability of any such opportunities can be understood and progressed as appropriate</p>	<p>Residents will have greater access to good quality social housing across the borough as a result of increased supply</p>

Address the housing affordability crisis in Thurrock

Context

Nationally, housing affordability has worsened over the past 20 years, with London and the South East containing some of the country's most unaffordable areas. There has been a decline in the proportion of owner occupiers and an increase in the proportion of people in private rented accommodation.

While private rental has advantages such as greater flexibility to move home, currently the sector also contains the highest proportion of poor-quality homes, offers the least stability, and is the most expensive relative to the monthly cost of social rent and mortgage fees.

Although definitions and schemes exist to explain what affordable housing can be, there is no single methodology or model for determining what constitutes 'affordable' housing.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework, published in July 2021, defines affordable housing as “housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market” and falls into one or more of the following:

- affordable housing for rent
- starter homes
- discounted market sales housing
- other affordable routes to homeownership

The document goes into greater detail for each of the above four categories, referring to schemes and models such as shared ownership, equity loans, social rent, and affordable rent. However, many of these 'affordable' housing products would not be affordable to lower-income households.

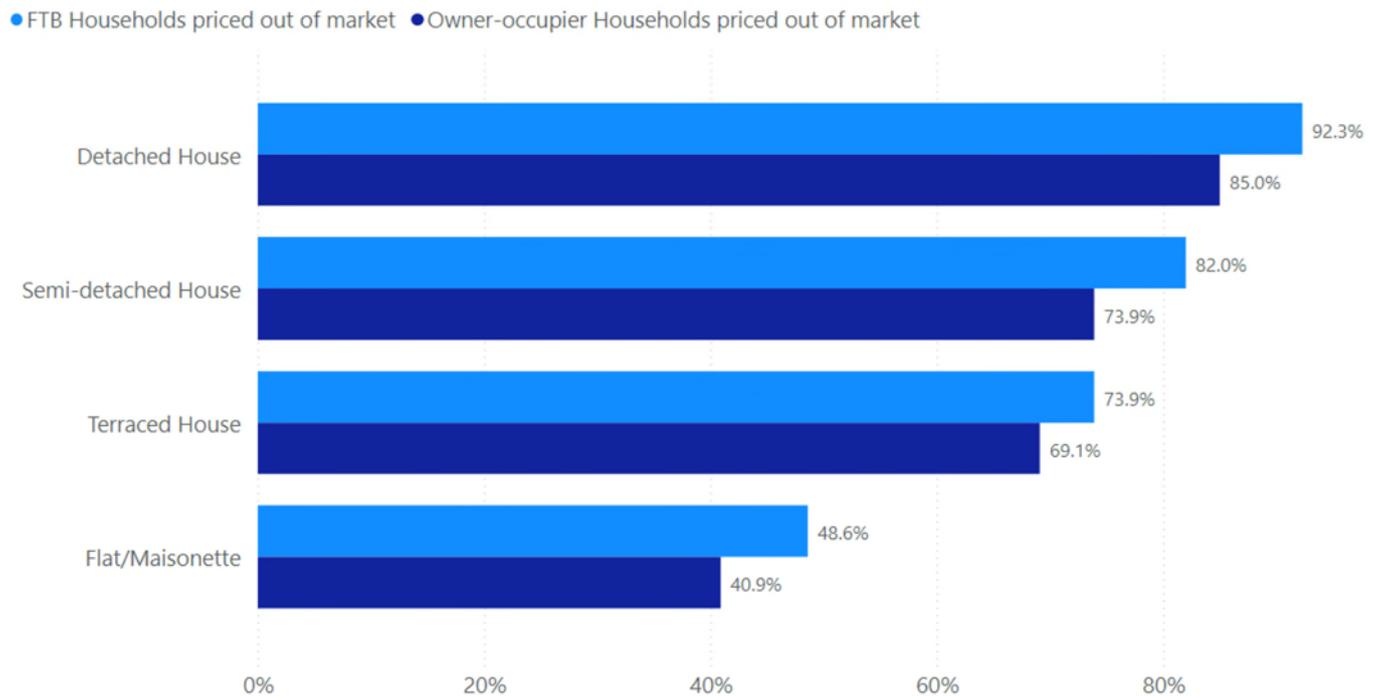
There are models for affordability, such as the Housing Costs to Income Ratio (HCIR), that suggests that if a household is spending more than a third of its net income on rent or mortgage costs, that accommodation would not be deemed to be affordable. The HCIR does not take into consideration other property related bills such as council tax or utility costs. There is also the standard measure outlined in an earlier section of this report of 'Affordable Rent' being 80% of median market rents.

The greatest challenge in defining affordability is that it is subjective and heavily influenced by each household's circumstances and housing needs. Determining what 'affordable' means based solely on market rents does not consider the disparity between the incomes of households, nor does it consider the source of those incomes.

Data assessed as part of an affordability joint strategic needs assessment identified that although Thurrock continues to be slightly more affordable than its surrounding neighbouring areas, it is still much less affordable than many other areas in the country. It has also become increasingly more unaffordable over the past five years compared to other local areas. Those in the lower income quartiles are worst affected.

Affordability concerns are also prevalent for those wanting to buy in Thurrock. The chart below indicates the percentage of the first-time buyer and existing owner-occupier households in the borough that would be priced out of the market, based on 4x household incomes, local property prices and national loan-to-value statistics.

Property Purchase Unaffordability by Property Type/Buyer Type



This means that there is likely to be a considerable number of households for whom home ownership is not an option, in turn increasing the number of households looking to privately rent or socially rent. There is a need to ensure that these options are available and affordable for these households. There is also a need to ensure that these options are of suitable quality and security to mitigate against potential poor health effects of unhealthy housing.

The table below provides a snapshot of average weekly rental values and measures in Thurrock based on tenure type.

Number of Bedrooms	Local Housing Allowance Rate	Social Rent (Council)	Affordable Rent (Council)	30th Percentile Market Rent	80% Median Market Rent	Median Market Rent
1	£161	£77	£130	£172	£146	£183
2	£201	£85	£153	£219	£185	£231
3	£247	£105	£199	£289	£244	£305
4	£307	£118	-	£365	£313	£392

In this above table:

- LHA Rate – Local Housing Allowance, the maximum amount of Housing Benefit or the housing costs element of Universal Credit that eligible residents can claim – this has been frozen since April 2020
- Social Rent – the average social rent charged (excluding service charges) for properties owned by the council

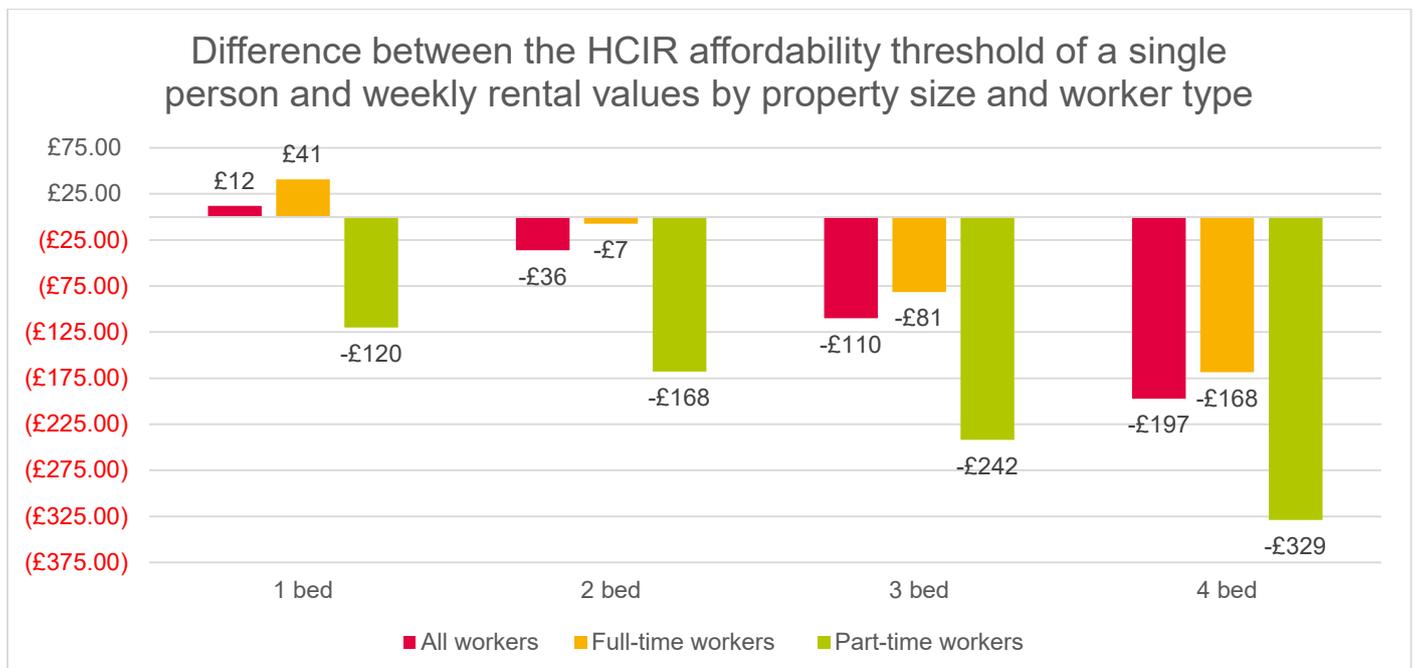
- Affordable rent – the average affordable rent charged (excluding service charges) for properties owned by the council
- 30th Percentile – 30% of private market rents fall below this value, and this measure was used as the benchmark to set the LHA rate in April 2020. Whilst LHA rates have been frozen since this time, market rents have continued to increase
- 80% Median – 80% of the value of the average market rent, used for calculating 'affordable rent' in line with the Government definition
- Market Rent – indicates the value in the middle of the range of private market rents

There is then the challenge of households living in properties that may be deemed affordable, but that comes at the cost of quality, standard of living and decency of accommodation.

The table below provides details of median earnings for Thurrock residents alongside an affordability threshold calculated using the HCIR model.

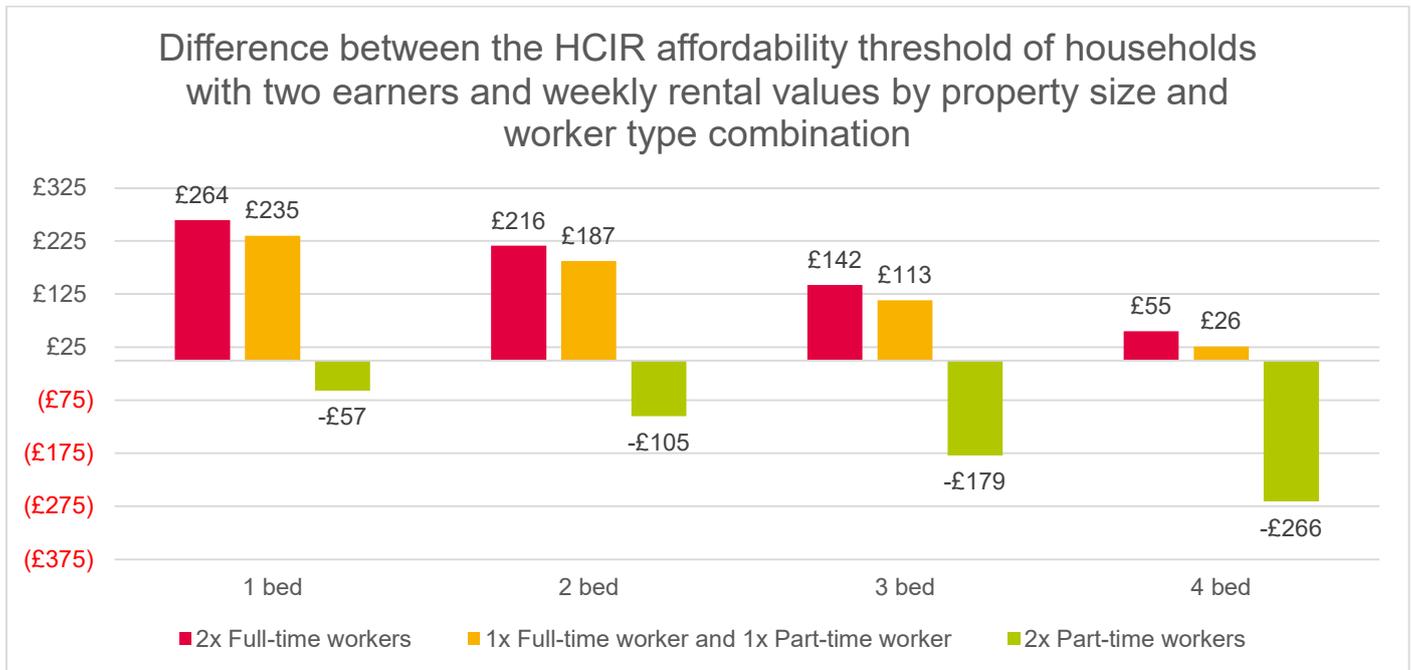
Workers	Median Weekly Earnings	Affordability threshold (HCIR)
All Workers	£584.50	£194.83
Full-time Worker	£670.60	£223.53
Part-time Worker	£189.30	£63.10

The following chart compares median weekly earnings for a single person to median weekly market rents by property size. It evidences the difference between the affordability threshold of a single person and rental values in Thurrock. Negative figures represent the amount by which weekly rental values exceed HCIR affordability thresholds, effectively indicating unaffordability.



Single full-time workers appear to be more likely to find one-bedroom properties affordable within the private rental sector; however, for other property sizes, and for other worker types across property sizes affordability is significantly impacted.

Finally, the below chart provides an indication of possible household combinations based on worker types compared to median weekly market rents, showing the difference between the household affordability threshold and rental values. As with the above chart, negative figures represent the amount by which weekly rental values exceed HCIR affordability thresholds.



The above chart illustrates that households with two earners where at least one is a full-time worker will find the private rental market more affordable with an affordability buffer of between £26 and £264 per week depending on property size. For households with no full-time earners, accessing properties with median market rents is extremely unaffordable, with rental values exceeding affordability thresholds by £57 to £266 per week, depending on property size.

Impact

Housing can have positive and negative impacts on health that may be direct and indirect. Good quality homes, that are suitable for the needs of the people living in them offer a strong base from which people can study, work, raise a family and enjoy life in as they grow into their later years.

Those experiencing challenges with affordability in Thurrock will often find that the properties within their budget will be of poorer quality, will be less secure and will be less suitable housing for residents. These residents therefore experience an unequal distribution of housing related health risks.

A poor-quality home, for example one that is damp, mouldy, and cold, can exacerbate physical health problems, negatively impact mental health and may impact on the residents' ability to study, work and otherwise use and enjoy their home.

Due to current house prices and household incomes in Thurrock, data indicates that homeownership is unaffordable for almost half of all first-time buyers looking to purchase flats or

maisonettes in the borough. As property sizes increase, so too does the proportion of first-time buyers and existing owner-occupiers that would find purchasing unaffordable.

The impact of current rental levels compared to earnings means that, for many, this is not an affordable option either. Although a single full-time worker earning the median weekly pay would find themselves approximately £41 within the HCIR affordability threshold for a one-bedroom property based on median market rents, a full-time worker receiving a weekly pay at the 30th percentile would have a buffer of less than £2 per week.

Households on the lowest incomes in Thurrock who need to rent privately are at highest risk of tenancy insecurity due to unaffordability, often requiring financial assistance such as Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. Rising rental value levels mean that there are shortfalls between maximum LHA rates and private market rents across Thurrock. The table below indicates the discrepancies that residents eligible to receive the maximum amount of Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit would face in relation to 30th percentile and median market rents.

Number of beds	30th Percentile Market Rents – Weekly Shortfall	Median Market Rents – Weekly Shortfall	30th Percentile Market Rents – Annual Shortfall	Median Market Rents – Annual Shortfall
1 bed	-£11	-£22	-£572	-£1,144
2 bed	-£18	-£30	-£936	-£1,560
3 bed	-£42	-£58	-£2,184	-£3,016
4 bed	-£58	-£85	-£3,016	-£4,420

The table above shows the growing shortfall between rising market rents and maximum LHA rates. In a little under two years since LHA rates were realigned with the cheapest third of private rental sector properties, the discrepancy has grown to between £572 and £3,016 per year, and between £1,144 and £4,420 when LHA rates are compared to median market rents.

For households reliant on the housing element of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit for their housing costs, if these are insufficient to meet the actual rental costs of their property, they have little option but to use benefits provided for non-housing expenditure to meet the shortfall. This challenge of private sector affordability directly relates to the ever-increasing demand for accommodation at social and affordable rents.

There is also a challenge with relying on HCIR as a model to determine affordability, as it only considers the cost of rent or mortgage. It has no capacity to reflect the cost of living in Thurrock, the costs of energy and other utilities, nor the varied levels of earnings and income in the borough. Whilst it does provide an indication of sorts, it underestimates the scale of the affordability challenge. Resident and stakeholder feedback stressed the need to develop some other measure by which affordability can be expressed and defined, specifically for Thurrock.

Recent action

The council has introduced approximately 200 homes into its housing stock since the start of the 2020/21 financial year, comprising a mixture of new build properties and acquisitions from the housing market. Every one of these properties are offered at weekly rental levels within the LHA

rates applicable in Thurrock, making these properties the most affordable homes for rent in the borough.

This is the case across the approximately 9,900 homes in the council's housing stock, all of which are offered at social and affordable rent levels.

The council has committed that it will continue to deliver new homes through both estate regeneration and smaller scale development within affordable rent levels, continuing to ensure affordable housing is available to those most in need in Thurrock. Further details regarding these developments can be found within later sections of this chapter.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will introduce and maintain a 'Thurrock Affordability Standard' in order to accurately inform service delivery, policy design and housing development</p>	<p>We will use the Affordability JSNA to understand drivers of unaffordability in Thurrock along with data and resident feedback relating to the cost of living in the borough to establish an affordability standard that is realistic for Thurrock households</p> <p>We will identify gaps in service provision, for example by using the affordability standard in comparison with financial eligibility criteria in the Housing Allocations Policy, and revise these so they remain fit for purpose and offer routes to housing to those in need</p> <p>We will keep this standard under regular review to reflect the ever-changing landscape in the borough</p>	<p>Residents receiving support relating to housing will have their affordability measured against this standard to ensure routes into housing are identified and proposed that meet locally assessed affordability levels rather than generic calculations</p>

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will deliver at least 500 new council-owned affordable homes by 2027</p>	<p>We will provide at least 500 new homes at rent levels that are within those set by the Thurrock Affordability Standard (when established) and Local Housing Allowance rates</p> <p>We will assess affordability on a development-by-development basis alongside household costs and incomes in Thurrock at that time in order to ensure that rents can be offered at appropriate levels</p> <p>We will always assess the viability for any new development against Local Housing Allowance rates and the Thurrock Affordability Standard (when established)</p>	<p>Residents will have access to good quality new build homes in council-led developments that are within realistic affordability levels for Thurrock households</p>
<p>We will maximise the delivery of genuinely affordable housing in new developments in order to boost access and availability</p>	<p>We will use development management, the Housing Strategy, and the Local Plan as vehicles for delivering a minimum provision of 35% of the total number of residential units built to be affordable housing</p> <p>We will embed the Thurrock Affordability Standard in assessments of local housing need</p>	<p>Residents will have greater opportunities to access affordable housing across the borough, allowing them to live in areas of their preference</p>

What?	How?	Impact?
We will support households to maximise their income in order to increase the range of affordable housing options	<p>We will build meaningful and lasting partnerships with the community and voluntary sector in order to allow residents to be better supported through knowledge and information sharing, timely and appropriate signposting and access to training and employment opportunities</p> <p>We will continue to provide financial inclusion support for Thurrock residents</p>	Residents experiencing difficulties in accessing or sustaining homes due to financial pressures will have improved affordability and can more easily find or maintain settled accommodation
We will establish a social lettings agency for Thurrock in order to expand private housing options for residents	We will engage with and support private sector landlords to increase the supply of affordable and good quality private rental sector properties, and explore opportunities for direct property acquisition	Residents will have greater choice and availability within the private rental sector for good quality homes offered at affordable levels in Thurrock

Prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping in Thurrock

Context

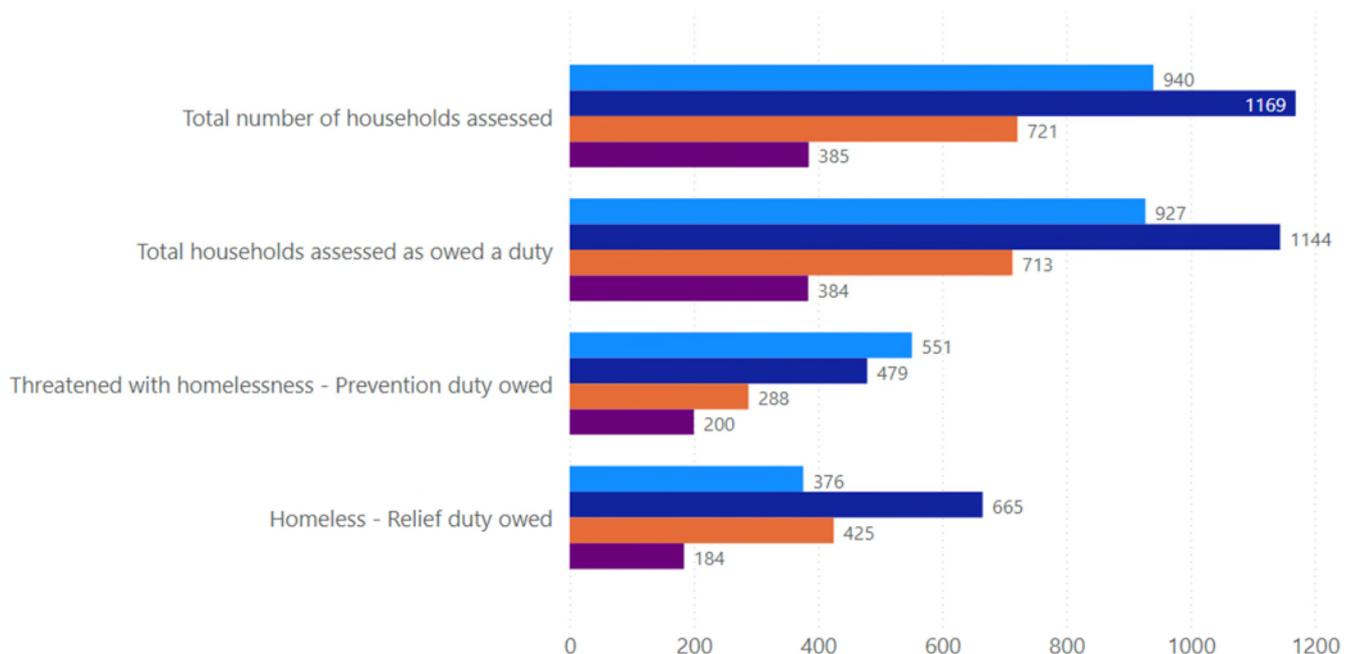
Homelessness is a complex societal issue. The impact on the lives of individuals and households, and the response required from public and third sector organisations is significant.

Homelessness detrimentally effects the physical and mental health and wellbeing of individuals, impacts their access to health and care services, is a factor in increased drug and alcohol misuse, and disrupts the work, education, and support networks of households.

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 saw the council experience an increase in the number of households approaching the organisation for assistance regarding homelessness. The chart below indicates the number of households that approached the council for assessments since the start of the 2018/19 reporting year. All figures for 2021/22 are based on the latest available statutory returns (April 2021-September 2021).

Homeless Approaches (2018/19 to 2021/22)

● 2018/19 ● 2019/20 ● 2020/21 ● 2021/22



The initial assessment identifies if the council has a statutory homeless duty to the household that submitted the application. A household may be owed the prevention duty if the household is eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness, in which case the local authority must take reasonable steps to help the household to secure that accommodation does not cease to be available for their occupation.

Alternatively, a household may be owed the relief duty if the household is experiencing homelessness and is eligible for assistance. In this case, the local authority must take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that accommodation becomes available for at least six months.

A reduction in assessments can be observed after the end of the 2019/20 reporting year can be directly and primarily attributed to the impact of measures implemented by the Government to support people to remain in secure and settled accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures included the extension of eviction notice periods, which returned to pre-pandemic lengths in October 2021, and the prevention of bailiff enforced evictions that was lifted in May 2021.

In 2018/19 and 2019/20, households approaching the council for a homelessness assessment were more likely to be owed the prevention duty as they were threatened with homelessness, rather than the prevention duty that would have been owed if they were experiencing homelessness.

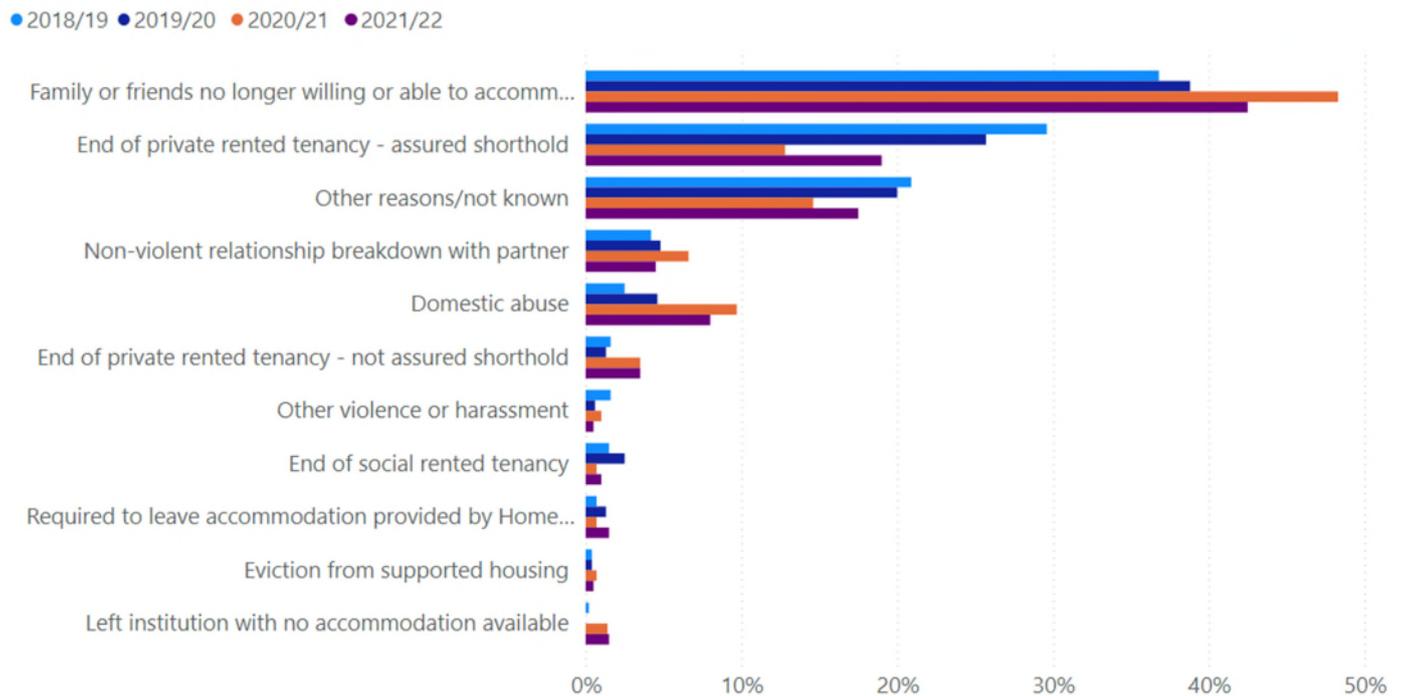
In 2020/21 this balance reversed, with more households owed the relief duty than the prevention duty. As already outlined, during the COVID-19 pandemic support was in place to keep renters and homeowners in their settled homes, including mortgage payment holidays, leading to fewer households facing homelessness due to the threat of eviction or repossession.

These reasons for homelessness tend to have advanced warning or notice, meaning that action can be taken to sustain tenancies; however, other reasons for the loss of accommodation require swifter support and action.

For example, the proportion of applicants that lost their accommodation due to domestic abuse and owed the relief duty is higher than those who would be owed the prevention duty.

The tables below present further information regarding the reasons for the loss of settled accommodation, split by the households owed the prevention duty and households owed the relief duty. Within the tables, the classification *other reasons/not known* includes fire/flood/other emergency, left HM forces, mortgage repossession, property disrepair, other or unknown reasons for the loss of settled accommodation.

Reason For Loss Of Last Settled Homes For Households Owed A Prevention Duty



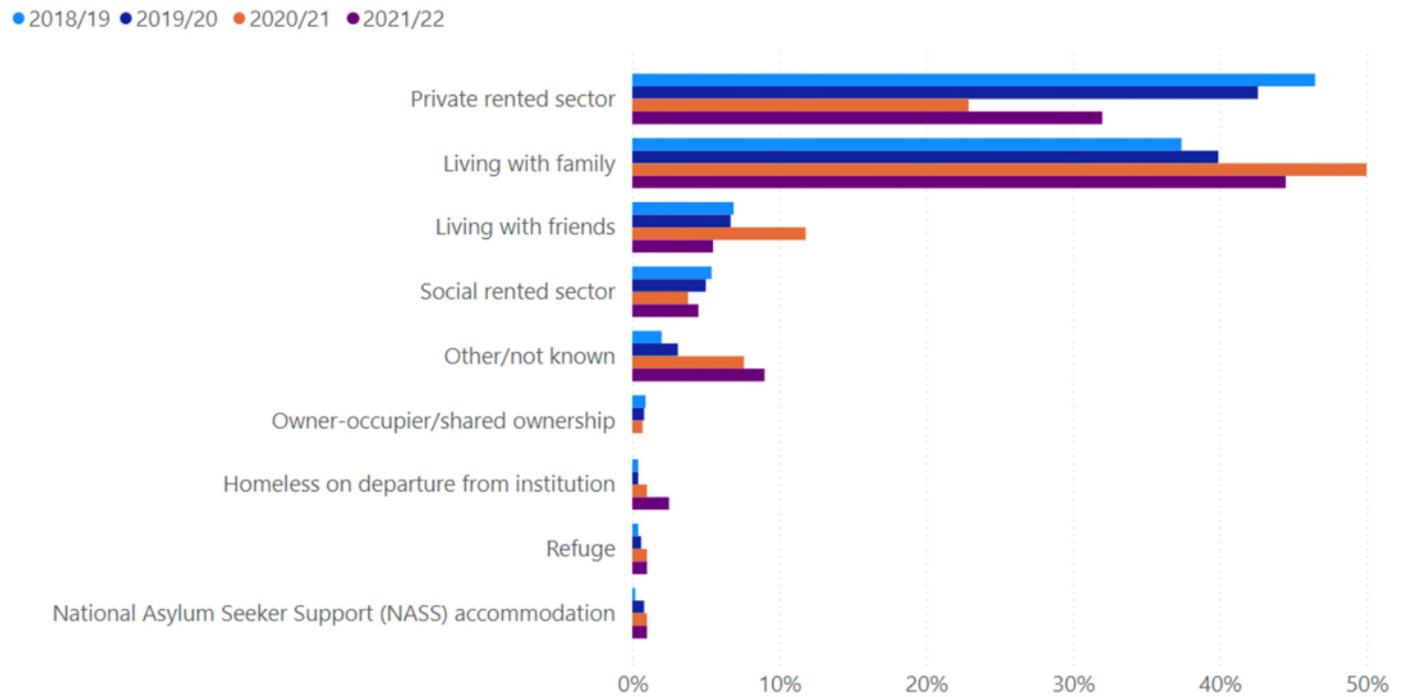
Reason For Loss Of Last Settled Homes For Households Owed A Relief Duty



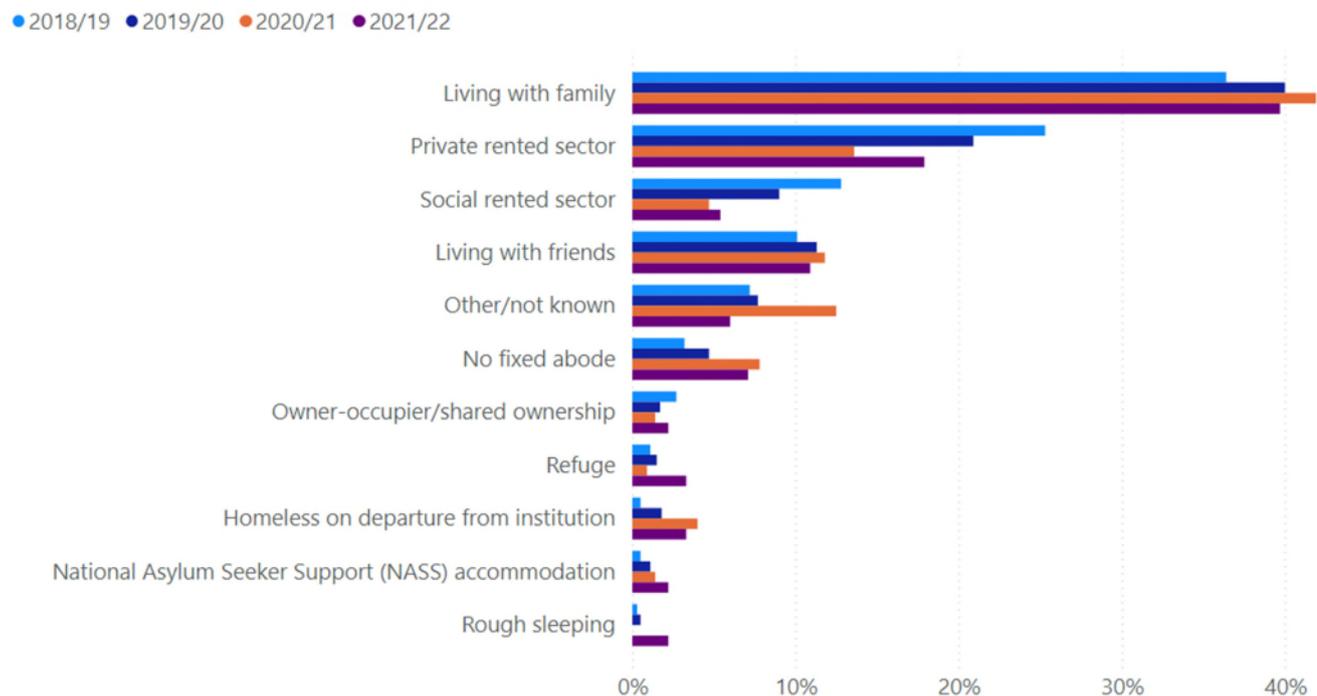
Both charts demonstrate the sharp reduction after March 2020 in the proportion of households owed prevention or relief duties due to the end of a private rental sector tenancy. Family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate remained the most prevalent reason for the actual or threat of loss of settled accommodation in Thurrock, with the proportion increasing noticeably in the 2020/21 financial year.

The charts below present data regarding the type of accommodation at the point that a homelessness application was submitted, again split by those owed the prevention duty and those owed the relief duty. Other/not known includes caravan/houseboat, student accommodation, looked after children placement, tied accommodation, Armed Forces accommodation, other and unknown types of accommodation.

Accommodation At Time Of Application For Those Owed A Prevention Duty



Accommodation At Time Of Application For Those Owed A Relief Duty



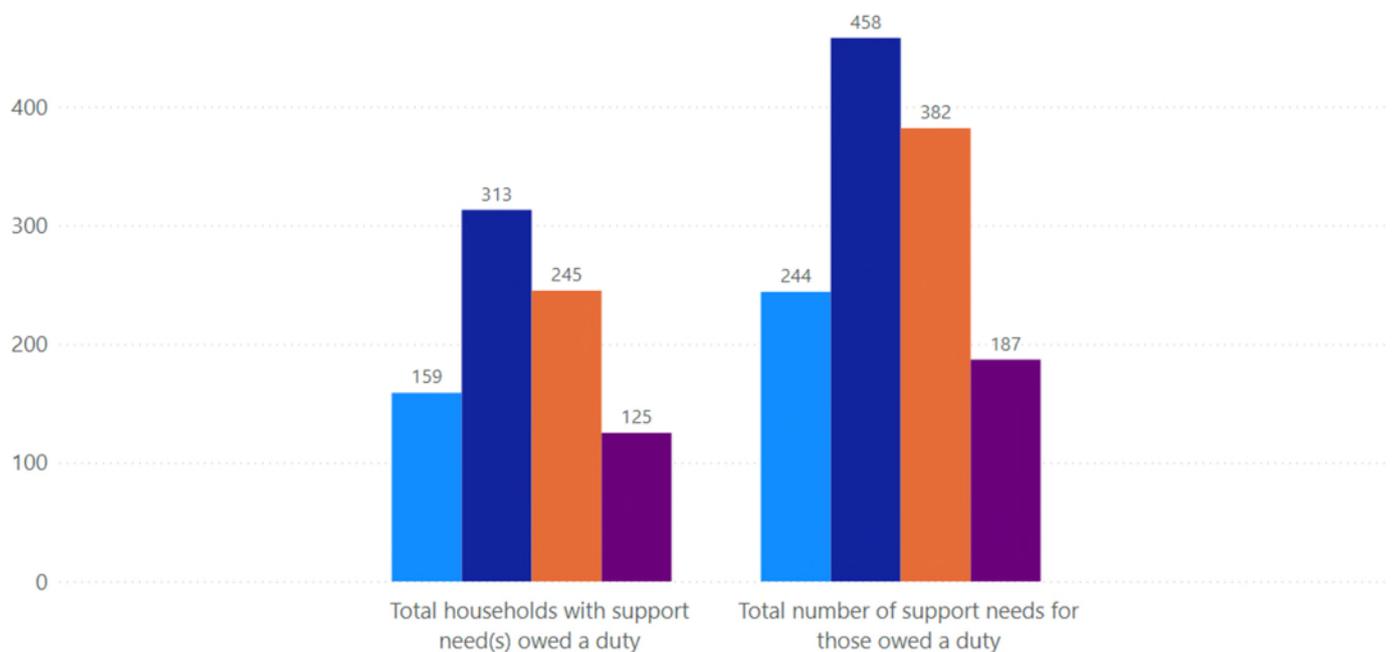
Again correlating with the protections for private rental sector tenants, a reduction in the proportion of the loss of private rental sector accommodation can be seen from 2020/21 compared to previous years. Over the past two years, the largest proportion of those owed the prevention and relief duties were those living with family.

When considering the types of households experiencing or threatened with homelessness in Thurrock, the proportion of single adult males and single adult females seeking assistance have generally increased over the past four years, and with single adult males accounting for more than two in every five household types owed the relief duty.

When submitting and progressing through a homelessness application, household support needs are identified. The proportion of households with support needs owed either the prevention or relief duties has generally been increasing over the past four years.

Households With Support Needs Owed a Duty

● 2018/19 ● 2019/20 ● 2020/21 ● 2021/22



The most prevalent support need for applicants in Thurrock has consistently been where there has been a history of mental health problems within the household, followed by those with physical ill health and disability and those at risk of or have experienced domestic abuse.

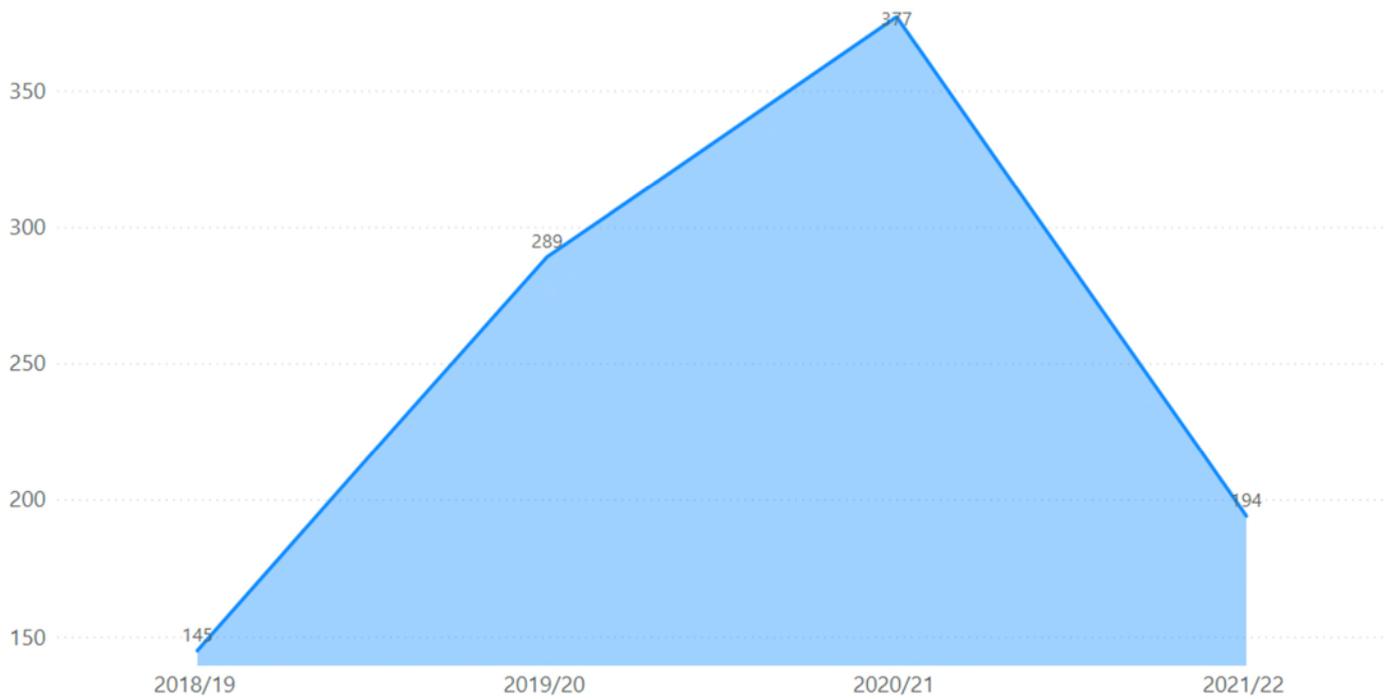
The council's Veteran's Charter recognises that those who have served in the armed forces may experience issues in accessing and securing accommodation. Although the above chart presents a comparatively low number of applicants approaching the council for assistance that had served in the armed forces, there should be proactive identification of veterans approaching the council's homelessness service to ensure that specialised advice and information is offered to support former armed forces members to secure safe and suitable accommodation.

In general, where homelessness can be prevented or relieved, the most prevalent type of accommodation offered is in the private rental sector, and this has been the case for a number of years.

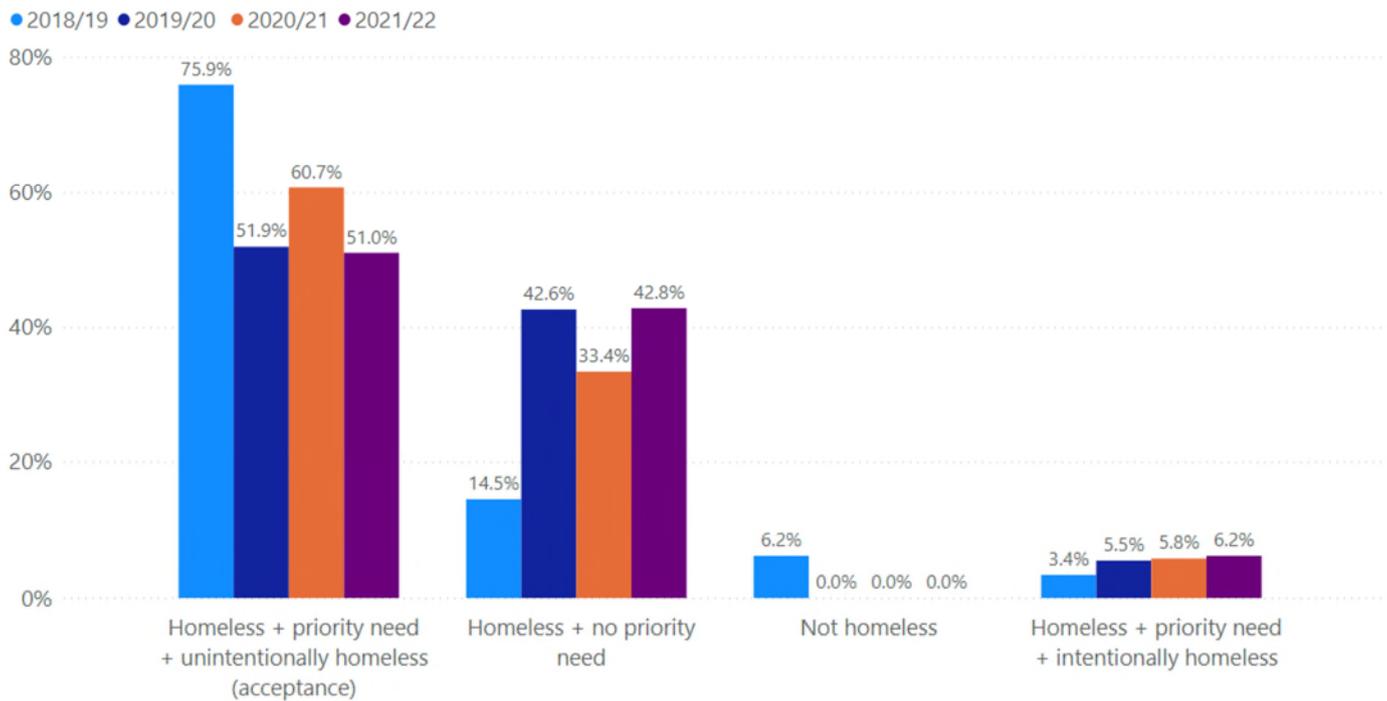
Action the local authority can take to prevent or relieve homelessness include helping households to secure accommodation found by the applicants (with and without financial payment), directly securing accommodation through the housing options services, negotiation, advocacy and mediation, and other financial payments, such as those to reduce arrears.

If accommodation cannot be sustained through the prevention duty or assistance to secure accommodation is not successful during through the relief duty, a further assessment is undertaken to understand if the household is owed the main housing duty. The main housing duty owed by a local authority to someone who is homeless, eligible, has a priority need and is not intentionally homeless.

Main Duty Decisions by Year



Outcome Of Main Duty Decision For Eligible Households

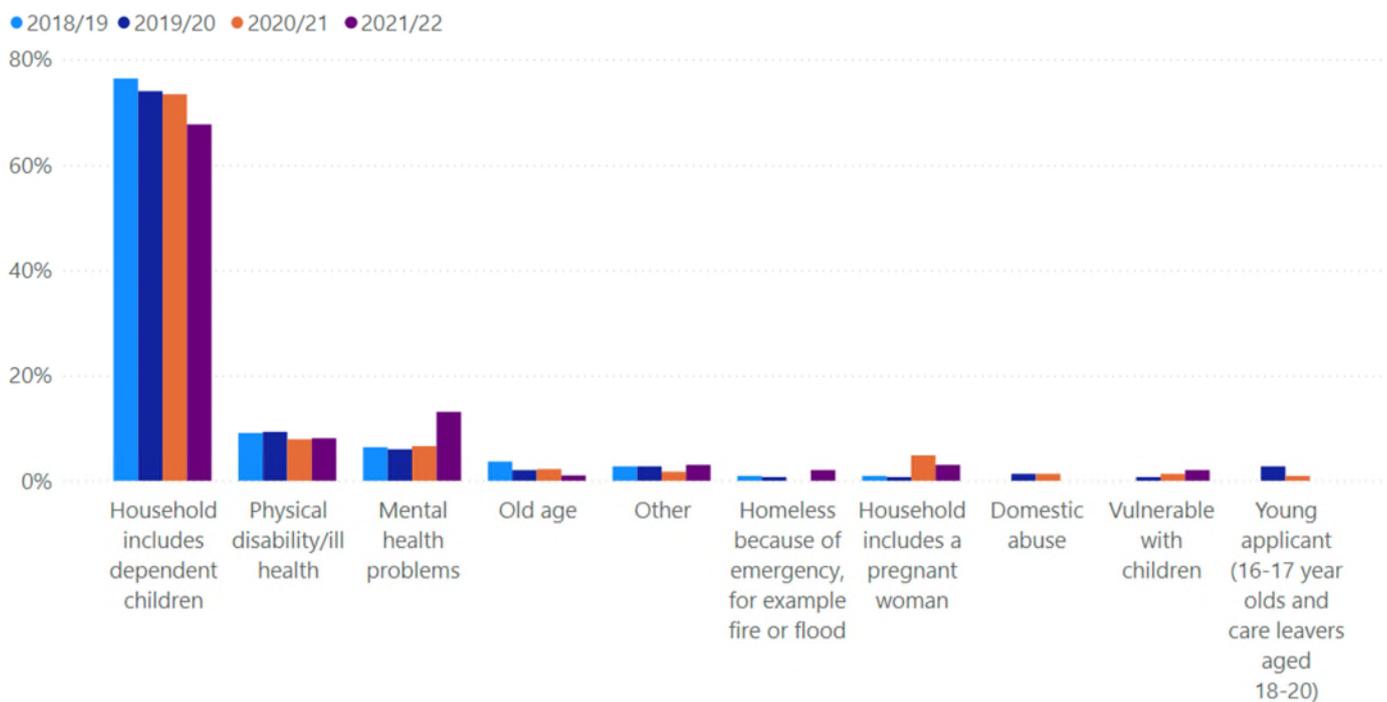


A number of factors are considered to determine whether a homeless household has a priority need for housing. Some groups of people, such as pregnant women, households with dependent children and victims of domestic abuse must be accepted as in priority need.

Others, such as those with physical disabilities or mental health illnesses and disabilities may also be in priority need if they would be significantly more vulnerable than an ordinary person would be if they became homeless.

The chart below provides an indicator of the priority need of households owed the main housing duty by Thurrock Council. The table, the classification 'other' incorporates alcohol/drug dependency, learning difficulty, time spent in care, in custody, in HM forces or as former asylum seeker, and those fleeing home because of violence other than domestic abuse.

Priority Need Of Households Owed A Main Duty



Although the proportion of households with dependent children within all those owed a main duty has seen a slight year-on-year reduction, it remains the most significant priority need in homeless households Thurrock. There has been a noticeable increase in the proportion of households identified in priority need of housing as a result of mental health problems, with physical disability and ill health remaining a consistent factor for priority need.

Unlike accommodation secured through the prevention and relief duties, most of the accommodation offered to households owed the main housing duty was social housing, however the use of private rental sector properties has been increasing in recent years.

Impact

It is generally recognised that prevention is more effective and less costly than responding to crisis, and with homelessness this is no different. If the balance of homelessness assessments continued as evidenced in 2020/21 with the number of relief duty cases outweighing prevention duty, it would mean that there would be increased pressures on the resources and finances of public services, and far greater numbers of Thurrock residents experiencing the distress and harms of homelessness.

A focus on proactive identification of households in Thurrock at risk of or threatened with homelessness provides far better opportunities to support and prevent reaching the point of loss of their settled accommodation.

The data indicates a range of diverse support needs in the households that approach the council for homelessness assistance in Thurrock. To appropriately prevent or relieve homelessness, sufficient levels of suitable accommodation are required in Thurrock, however previous sections of this chapter have illustrated the undersupply of new homes in recent years, exacerbating pressures on existing properties.

The above data indicates that there are greater opportunities to prevent and relieve homelessness by accessing properties in the private rental sector, however if homelessness cannot be relieved that the vast majority of households identified to be in priority need are made offers of social housing.

Again, the information in this chapter evidences a chronic shortage of affordable social housing in Thurrock. Without appropriate homes for people to move to there is a risk that vulnerabilities can be exacerbated, stays in temporary accommodation extend and alternative locations are considered, and households experiencing homelessness will be pushed further into crisis.

The information on assessments shared above indicates that rather than there being an overall downward trend and reduction of households experiencing homelessness, it suggests that certain causes of homelessness were suppressed in recent years. Caution remains regarding the possibility of an increase in households seeking homelessness advice and assistance because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which would place additional pressures on the Housing Solutions service, social housing stock and the private rental sector in Thurrock.

With rising inflation, stretched household budgets and a potential backlog of possession proceedings to progress through the courts that were held up during 2020 and 2021, it is highly likely that there will be a surge in Thurrock households experiencing financial hardship and at risk of homelessness in the months and years ahead.

To minimise the risk of harm that homelessness can cause to individuals, the consequences of COVID-19 must be kept under close review throughout the lifetime of this strategy until evidence suggests that the risk has been successfully mitigated or addressed appropriately.

Recent action

Although the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 generally directed local housing authorities to place much greater focus on homelessness prevention through general service provision, Thurrock Council's housing service has taken significant action to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness.

A number of roles have been created and exist in the service to target specific areas of challenge or priority regarding homelessness, with some funded in part or full from DLUHC grants. These roles include:

- rough sleeper coordinator, whose close links to the community, voluntary and faith sector facilitates not only the identification of those experiencing rough sleepers but also those who may be at risk reaching crisis and losing their homes
- landlord and tenant liaison officer, exclusively tasked with preventing tenancy breakdown, negotiating with landlords and preventing illegal evictions
- tenancy sustainment officer, working with the rough sleeping cohort
- private lettings officer, specialising in supporting those with a history of rough sleeping, working and negotiating with landlords to secure accommodation and overcoming barriers such as guarantors and references
- financial inclusion officer, supporting residents to maximise their incomes, claim applicable benefits, establish budgets and payment plans, and prioritise debts appropriately

- mental health senior practitioner, seconded from adult social care into the housing solutions team to undertake assessments and assist households in identifying and accessing support to meet their needs

The ongoing temporary accommodation transformation plan has delivered successful outcomes to date, reducing the number of households in emergency and temporary accommodation significantly below pre-pandemic levels.

The council has access to a funding pot which can be used flexibly to help prevent homelessness, supporting in particular those unlikely to be in priority need. An allocation of £50,000 was also awarded to the council by the European Social Fund to set up and manage an ex-offenders housing and employment project in Tilbury.

There are also a number of cross-service initiatives that aim to support households at risk of or experiencing homelessness. An arrears panel has been established focussing on council tenants at risk of eviction. The panel features wide representation from across the council with a sole focus on the prevention of tenancy breakdown, with opportunity for interdepartmental working to tackle issues and avoid homelessness.

Briefings and training sessions have been delivered by housing solutions staff to colleagues in adults social care and children's services around the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the council's allocations policy, expectations and rights relating to homelessness and early warning indicators of homelessness that staff can look out for and refer accordingly for appropriate intervention. There are aims to deliver these sessions to other frontline and resident facing staff across the organisation.

Multi-disciplinary groups have been established to review case studies from the different perspectives of partners in the wider system, developing a shared understanding of existing challenges and aiming to identify areas of good practice and where improvement can be made to reach positive outcomes for households in the future.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
We will effectively eliminate rough sleeping in Thurrock	We will provide appropriate and timely support for people experiencing rough sleeping by making an offer of accommodation to every verified rough sleeper, and sharing knowledge between partners to help identify those individuals	Residents experiencing rough sleeping face some of the most severe health inequalities and report much poorer health than the general population, and those who experience rough sleeping over an extended period are, on average, more likely to die young Proactive work to tackle rough sleeping will significantly reduce the likelihood of people experiencing these severe health inequalities

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will support residents experiencing hardship across all tenures in order to prevent homelessness and sustain their homes</p>	<p>We will identify people at risk of homelessness early, preventing homelessness by adopting a holistic approach across the wider system where concerns and early indicators can be referred to the housing service for action</p> <p>We will monitor and review the impact and consequences of COVID-19 on the security of tenure for Thurrock households</p>	<p>Residents at risk of losing their homes will be proactively supported to avoid crisis and prevent the experience and harms of homelessness</p>
<p>We will work in partnership across the system in order to improve access to health, care and support services for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness</p>	<p>We will establish an initiative to bring together community and voluntary sector organisations, health partners and other support services in a physical location to directly support those who are at risk of or who are experiencing homelessness</p> <p>We will co-design bespoke solutions with each resident to address all the factors that may be contributing to their homelessness or risk of homelessness, such as addiction, mental health and debt</p>	<p>Residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness would receive meaningful, personal and better target support which is specific to their circumstances with the aim of securing appropriate settled accommodation</p>
<p>We will ensure that any households requiring temporary accommodation remain within the borough wherever possible and for as little time as possible</p>	<p>We will increase and maintain the number of council-owned properties for use as temporary accommodation in the borough, and only look to make out-of-borough placements where it is for safety reasons or in the best interests of the household by purchasing or leasing up to 115 properties by 2023, prioritised for those at risk of homelessness</p>	<p>Residents requiring temporary accommodation placements will experience significantly less disruption through the use of in-borough council-owned by ensuring that they are provided with better quality homes and remain close to any places of work or education and existing support networks</p> <p>This approach will also reduce the financial pressures associated with costly nightly-let style temporary accommodation</p>

Deliver sustainable estate regeneration

Context

Estate regeneration provides the opportunity to enhance estates, address issues of health inequalities and deprivation whilst increasing the provision of housing on site. The council has identified key areas requiring significant investment that would benefit from wider regeneration to deliver new and better-quality housing.

Council investments in existing housing stock need to be continually reviewed to ensure that programmes achieve the best outcomes for residents and maximise the overall value of assets. The aim is to ensure future reinvestment in properties that are well located, meet housing needs and are efficient to manage.

Investments also need to be made to ensure that homes and neighbourhoods support the health and wellbeing of residents in the local area.

Much of the council's existing housing stock is considered maintainable in the long-term; however, the council recognises that some property archetypes present challenges in ongoing maintenance and the living environment due to their age or build type.

For such properties, it may be that an alternative use could be more appropriate. Alternative uses may include using the land or housing assets to build additional homes to increase the number of council-owned and managed dwellings available, of the type and quality needed and in areas where people want to live.

Further practical options could include:

- re-designation or re-use of properties
- remodelling of properties
- infill development or full site redevelopment
- development on previously undeveloped or cleared land

Several potential locations have already been identified to be taken forward for housing redevelopment and regeneration, such as the Blackshots high-rise tower blocks, blocks of flats at Teviot Avenue, and part of the Civic Offices site in Grays.

The high-rise blocks at Blackshots experience problems with damp and mould and attract the most with complaints about this issue across all high-rise blocks in Thurrock. There are interim plans to address some immediate issues at the Blackshots blocks in respect of the existing external cladding system, the ventilation of the communal areas and weatherproofing of the structure; however, this will not address the overall design and layout of these properties which does not meet the requirements of today's modern living. For example, the kitchens cannot accommodate all modern-day appliances, and there is no separate clothes drying space within the blocks.

Teviot Avenue, Aveley, contains 36 flats constructed of pre-cast reinforced concrete of the 'Cornish' type. These dwellings were of a type designated as defective initially under the 1984 Housing Defects Act, consolidated into the 1985 Housing Act, due to their construction material and manufacture.

A refurbishment was scheduled for Teviot Avenue in the next 5 to 10 years, so a survey was instructed to assess the condition of the structures and record the location of defects, and also to provide commentary on the remedial works and improvements required to maintain the blocks in the medium term.

However, the survey identified several issues with the flats at Teviot Avenue, including inherent structural defects due to the construction method. These defects can only be remediated by substantial reconfiguration of the overall structure. Therefore, the reconsideration of options was required for the estate and long-term sustainability.

After the completion of a stock options appraisal and initial engagement with residents, the preferred option to be progressed is to redevelop the site and provide more homes.

The position on redeveloping Civic Offices 1 (CO1) for residential accommodation and the benefits of providing a new council facility in the Civic Office extension were agreed at Cabinet in September 2019, with the benefits of developing CO1 for residential accommodation being a contributory factor in bringing the Civic Offices Project forward.

An initial range of designs and cost plans were developed that considered options from refurbishing the existing accommodation as apartments through to a range of demolition and new build alternatives of differing levels of height and density. Following review, the preferred option was for a new build project of approximately 80 homes.

Options for a market sale or private rented sector development proved not to be financially viable, however a scheme based on 100% council-owned social housing has been proposed and offers a financially sustainable model for developing the site.

Through extensive resident engagement, stock evaluations and options appraisals, it is anticipated that further regeneration possibilities will arise throughout the lifetime of this strategy.

Impact

Redevelopment and regeneration of housing and estates has short- and longer-term impacts and consequences. In the short term, to allow for major works to take place in existing residential areas, households living in properties identified for regeneration will need to be supported to move into alternative temporary or permanent accommodation elsewhere in the borough.

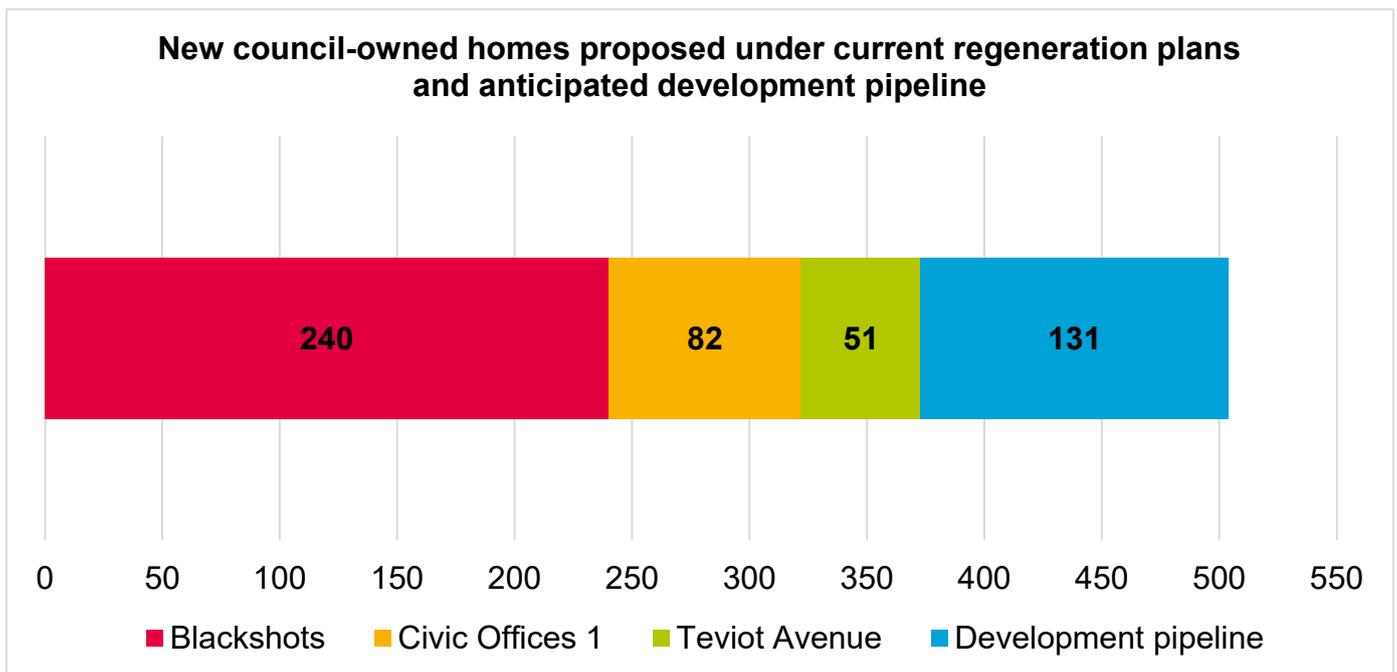
In both Blackshots and Teviot Avenue proposals, remediation works would prove costly and only extend the life of accommodation that had already been identified as falling short of meeting the needs and expectations of tenants and modern day living. In the longer term, the proposals to redevelop these sites (and others in the future) will deliver new homes and neighbourhoods meeting higher quality standards, with modern technology built-in to maximise thermal and energy efficiency.

These outcomes will directly benefit the residents that will live in these homes in the future, improving general health and wellbeing and reducing the risk of experiencing fuel poverty. Regeneration will also offer the opportunity to embed active travel, reduce dependency on car use and improve cycling infrastructure in new developments across Thurrock, improving health and wellbeing outcomes.

Recent action

The most significant regeneration project in Thurrock currently underway is the investment in over 140 acres at Purfleet-on-Thames, delivering up to 2,850 new homes. Purfleet Centre Regeneration Limited is a joint venture between Urban Catalyst and Swan Housing, in partnership with Thurrock Council. The first phase of 61 homes is currently anticipated to be handed over in Spring 2023.

Specific projects have commenced to take forward regeneration opportunities for council-owned homes at Blackshots, Teviot Avenue and Civic Offices 1. Initial resident engagement activity has already been completed with households at Blackshots and Teviot Avenue, with very high proportions in favour of redevelopment.



Although the schemes are still in early stages, the chart above provides an indication of the number of properties that each project is currently anticipated to be able to deliver.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
We will establish and embed a clear vision and deliver against ambitious plans in order to direct future housing development and regeneration	<p>We will deliver a Housing Development Strategy to regenerate and improve council estates</p> <p>We will undertake options appraisals for wider estate regeneration to establish proposals to improve the quality of homes and neighbourhoods for residents</p>	Residents will benefit from well-designed homes and estates as a direct result of council-led development that improve the local area and renew existing poorer quality housing

What?	How?	Impact?
We will deliver the major regeneration projects at Blackshots, CO1 and Teviot Avenue to provide modern, sustainable homes that are fit for the future	We will progress and deliver the regeneration of Blackshots, Civic Offices 1 and Teviot Avenue, delivering up to 373 new homes	Residents in Blackshots and Teviot Avenue will be supported to move into good quality homes that eliminate the current issues experienced in those locations, with new housing opportunities for residents across the borough at CO1
We will embed resident engagement in estate regeneration in order to deliver projects that meet local needs	We will work closely with our residents to understand their priorities, identify required estate improvements, and progress opportunities for new housing to transform and enhance neighbourhoods	Residents will have direct input, influence and opportunity to shape future council-owned developments and ensure that they meet their needs and priorities
We will target the regeneration approach in order to maximise the value of housing assets	<p>We will undertake full stock appraisals of assets where property archetypes continue to present challenges due to age or build type or where land redevelopment could offer opportunities to improve stock and provide better value for money</p> <p>We will ensure these appraisals consider, need and demand, and social, economic and neighbourhood sustainability factors</p> <p>We will use these appraisals to inform and recommend future programmes of investment or redevelopment to address identified issues</p>	Residents will be assured that new developments offer value for money, are financially viable and can be delivered

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will embed active travel in new developments in order to encourage sustainable transport and improve wellbeing</p>	<p>We will encourage a shift away from traffic growth in new developments and regeneration projects and help connect more residents to key services and facilities and to open space and nature</p> <p>We will embed cycling infrastructure into new developments</p>	<p>Residents will benefit from better connected homes and neighbourhoods that do not rely on private car use for access or transport</p>

Review the model of Sheltered Housing provision

Context

Housing providers throughout the country have recognised that the traditional approach to Sheltered Housing model may no longer be fit for purpose or match the lifestyles and aspirations of older people today. Sheltered housing stock and complexes can also appear dated.

The consequences of these factors combined leads to lower levels of demand, increased numbers of vacant properties, loss of rental income for housing providers as well as missed council tax revenue.

This challenge has been known and growing for some time nationally, with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation publishing housing research in December 1995 regarding the causes and consequences of difficulties letting sheltered housing properties.

The table below shows a snapshot of voids and lettings performance for council-owned sheltered housing properties in Thurrock since 2018/19.

Properties	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Current Void
Number of properties let in financial year (or currently void)	109	96	118	102	18
Number of properties advertised more than 4 times	4	1	23	26	6
Number of properties advertised more than 12 times	0	0	6	10	1
Number of properties advertised more than 20 times	0	0	0	5	0
Average number of bidding cycles per property	1.7	1.1	3.3	4.6	4.1
Average number of calendar days void	47.8	34.1	73.3	56.4	64.9

Thurrock Council operates a choice-based lettings system, whereby housing register applicants can place up to two bids each week on a list of advertised properties that meet their household needs each week. These are known as bidding cycles.

The above table shows that the average number of calendar days that a sheltered property is vacant has increased since the end of 2019/20. The increase in 2020/21 can be explained in part because of steps taken to suspend all choice-based lettings from 23 March 2020 until 11 June 2021 in response to the Government's 'Stay at Home' guidance. Allocations were still made for risk-assessed homeless households and applicants whose safety was at risk where they live, such as those experiencing domestic abuse.

The table also indicates that since 2020/21 there has been a significant increase in the average number of bidding cycles required for a successful offer of a sheltered housing property to be made to an applicant. Sometimes properties need to be readvertised if the shortlisted candidates refuse the property or withdraw from the allocation process, however sometimes the readvertisement is due to a lack of interest from applicants in that bidding cycle.

The increase in number of void days for 2020/21 cannot be explained by the choice-based lettings suspension entirely, however, as the average number of bidding cycles per property also increased which suggests that the extended void periods were more likely a result of the lack of interest from an appropriate housing register applicant. This trend appears to have continued into 2021/22, for properties that have been let as well as those that are currently void.

To better understand the drivers for increased void turnaround times and increased numbers of bidding cycles, lettings data can be broken down into property types. The table below is combined data for the period between 2018/19 and 2021/22.

Property Type	Number of properties let	Average number of bidding cycles per property	Average number of calendar days void
1 bed ground floor flat	205	1.2	41.4
1 bed first floor flat	189	4.6	68.1
1 bed second floor flat	7	3.3	100.0
1 bed third floor flat	3	1.0	42.0
1 bed bungalow	19	1.2	29.8
2 bed bungalow	2	1.0	66.5

The above table provides a clearer picture of applicant demand based on property types. In the reporting period, the number of 1 bed ground floor flats and 1 bed first floor flats are broadly similar. However, the successful letting of a 1 bed first floor flat takes almost four times as many bidding cycles than needed for a 1 bed ground floor flat and void periods are on average 64.5% longer. 1 bed second floor flats, whilst requiring fewer bidding cycles than 1 bed first floor flats, experience the longest void periods.

The relative difficulty in letting properties above the ground floor in sheltered housing may reflect concerns or preferences regarding accessibility of such properties for residents that meet the criteria for sheltered housing in Thurrock – a factor exacerbated by the fact that very few council-owned sheltered housing complexes with more than one floor have lifts.

Impact

Difficulties in letting properties, regardless of property type, impacts both the council and housing register applicants. The longer that a property remains vacant the greater the amount of lost revenue that could have otherwise been reinvested back into housing services, however it also means that the property is sitting vacant rather than providing a safe, suitable, and affordable home for a household in need.

If sheltered housing properties are not meeting the needs of eligible housing register applicants or existing residents, action must be taken. A human-centred approach can be explored to broaden the range of households eligible to move into sheltered housing, such as where an individual is below the current age threshold, but the sheltered housing environment would positively affect their quality of life. This type of approach can help to achieve aspirations of intergenerational living, but lettings must be made sensitively.

There is likely to continue to be a need for supported and specialist housing for older people in Thurrock, however significant consideration is needed to ensure that any new developments avoid the pitfalls of existing complexes with regards to accessibility.

Recent action

During the past two years, the Sheltered Housing team have continued to deliver a valuable service to all tenants. The service has been enhanced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring tenants had a contact at least twice weekly and supporting residents with food shopping and medication delivery.

The 'Oomph' wellness programme has been reinstated tenant attendance has been strong. The aim of Oomph is to provide fun activity and exercise sessions to benefit physical and mental wellbeing and reduce loneliness.

Several actions have been taken within the service to address underperformance in void turnaround, specifically regarding properties above the ground floor. A dedicated Sheltered Housing Officer has been assigned to this area to improve performance and is currently:

- proactively contacting tenants to support them to move from larger properties
- part of the decommissioning working group, supporting tenants to move and targeting harder to let properties
- working with the Allocations Team to identify suitable tenants and prioritise offers

Case Study – Alexandra Court Decommissioning

Residents are being supported to live independently in Sheltered Housing properties for longer and later in life. Whilst this is positive, as people age and their mobility reduces, they may face additional challenges due to the condition of the communal access points for their homes, subsequently impacting upon their quality of life and independence.

A 2019 report considered the condition of communal entrance points in the Sheltered Housing complexes across the council's housing stock.

This review included the 36 properties at Alexandra Road and the four properties at Dunlop Road, which collectively form the 'Alexandra Court' Sheltered Housing complex in the Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park ward.

The assessment of the access to the blocks at the Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex indicated that they did not meet the accessibility standards which the council aims to achieve.

Due to the scale of the suggested works for the Alexandra Court blocks to meet these standards, the disruption residents would face, the challenging space constraints at the site and the internal accessibility issues that would remain, such as stairs-only access to the first-floor flats, it was decided to decommission this complex in late 2020.

Whilst this decision posed a level of disruption to residents, a comprehensive package of support was designed to help them to move to alternative accommodation suitable for their needs. This included two dedicated officers assisting with key elements of moving home, such as:

- packing and removals

- assisting with the home loss and disturbance payments
- general moving requirements
- providing a smooth transition from one property to another

The nearby construction of Beaconsfield Place, a council-owned development using HAPPI principles for older people's housing, provided an opportunity for residents to move to a new home within their current community designed with accessibility requirements in mind. The development has 31 one-bedroom flats and 4 two-bedroom duplex flats, indoors communal spaces, private communal gardens for residents, ample parking and mobility scooter storage. The support of a sheltered housing officer will be provided at this new development.

Tenants from Alexandra Court were prioritised for the Beaconsfield Place development, if they wished to move there, and all residents were awarded the highest priority on the council's housing register to allow them to consider moving to another Sheltered Housing complex or appropriate property elsewhere in Tilbury or across Thurrock.

15 households were successfully supported to move into other sheltered housing complexes of their choice across Thurrock. A further 18 households from Alexandra Court moved to Beaconsfield Place following its handover into the council's housing stock in February 2022.

In the longer term, decommissioning this complex will allow the entire site to be considered as a redevelopment opportunity to provide new council-owned family-sized homes for the borough.

The Sheltered Housing Team is working with other services across the council to identify suitable applicants, making person-centred decisions relating to the age eligibility where a move to sheltered housing would have a beneficial impact on the health and wellbeing of a household.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
We will implement a new delivery model for Sheltered Housing in order to ensure this type of supported provision meets resident needs	We will explore options for changes and improvements with residents to provide a new delivery model for Sheltered Housing, including opportunities to include the delivery of an outreach independent living service	Residents requiring this type of supported living will be able to access a service that is person-centric, appropriate for their needs and reflects modern living
We will rationalise Sheltered Housing stock in order to identify opportunities to provide new housing	We will investigate options for the potential decommissioning of Sheltered Housing complexes which are underused or no longer fit for purpose and offer opportunities to redevelop into new housing	Residents in homes where accessibility is a challenge will be supported to move to accommodation that is better suited for their needs Residents will have access to newly developed homes that meet varied needs in existing and well-connected communities

What?	How?	Impact?
We will overhaul the approach to allocating Sheltered Housing properties in order to support more people to benefit from this type of accommodation	We will reassess the eligibility criteria for Sheltered Housing within the Allocations Policy and introduce a new approach to 'sensitive lettings' to improve access for residents	Residents that may benefit from the environment and style of living offered in sheltered housing complexes will be offered the opportunity to do so under a redeveloped lettings approach
We will invest in Sheltered Housing complexes in order to improve the day-to-day experience of residents	<p>We will develop new ways and opportunities for residents in Sheltered Housing to engage and collaborate with the housing team, other council services and external partners by increasing the use of technology in complexes</p> <p>We will invest in Sheltered Housing stock to improve conditions through internal and external decorating programmes</p> <p>We will continue the work to improve resident access to communal spaces in line with Equalities Act</p>	Residents living in sheltered housing complexes will be better connected to their neighbours and local area, reducing accessibility difficulties and tackling causes of social isolation

Chapter 6 – Protect Resident Safety

This chapter is focused on protecting people and working to prevent them from experiencing harm to their physical and mental health. It considers the physical environment relating to property conditions, fuel poverty, property accessibility and adaptations, and harm experienced from anti-social behaviour, crime, and domestic abuse. It also addresses and the general perception or feeling of safety in and around the home and neighbourhood.

The safety and security of residents in Thurrock are of paramount importance. They can be considered in two ways – the actions taken or required to protect physical safety and the actions taken or required to support people to feel safe. Although these are often aligned, it cannot be guaranteed that ensuring physical safety will result in a person feeling safe, and vice versa.

Improve warmth, safety, and standards in private sector homes

Context

All residents living in the borough must have access to good quality housing.

A significant amount of feedback was provided by residents during the development of this strategy relating to standards in the private sector. Responses suggested that action was required to ensure that all HMOs and other privately rented properties in Thurrock operate appropriately and safely, and to support vulnerable homeowners to live in warm and safe homes.

Private sector conditions

In 2021 the council commissioned a study to gather intelligence on the private housing stock in the borough. Through this, the council gained insight on the tenures, property conditions, likely instances of fuel poverty and geographical distribution of properties.

In recent years, Thurrock has seen growth in the number of properties used in the private rental sector, both as dwellings let in their entirety and as houses of multiple occupation (HMOs). The private rented sector, including HMOs, have an important role as housing provision in Thurrock. The 2021 study estimated that the size of the private rental sector in Thurrock had increased by 76.3% compared to the findings of the 2011 census.

The council uses a risk-based evaluation tool called the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to help identify potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in dwellings. The HHSRS is used to determine whether residential premises are safe to live in, or whether a hazard exists that may cause harm to the health and safety of a potential occupant.

The system assesses 29 types of housing hazard and provides a rating for each one. Those which score highly on the scale are called category 1 hazards and the council has a duty to take the appropriate enforcement action. Those that fall lower down the scale and pose a lesser risk are called category 2 hazards.

Physiological requirements:

- Hygrothermal Conditions – damp and mould growth, excess cold and excess heat
- Pollutants (non-microbial) – Asbestos, biocides, carbon monoxide and fuel combustion products, lead, radiation, uncombusted fuel gas, and volatile organic compounds

Psychological requirements:

- Space, security, light and noise – crowding and space, entry by intruders, lighting, noise

Protection against accidents:

- Falls – falls associated with baths, falling on level surfaces, falling on stairs, falling between levels, and so on
- Electric shocks, fires, burns and scalds – electrical hazards, fire, flames, hot surfaces
- Collisions, cuts and strains – collision and entrapment, explosions, position and operation of amenities, and structural collapse and falling elements

Protection against infection:

- Hygiene, sanitation, and water supply – domestic hygiene, pets and refuse, food safety, personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage, and water supply

The data provided in the private sector stock condition survey estimated that 11% of properties in the private sector are estimated to have at least one category 1 hazard. The table below provides a breakdown by private sector tenure type as well as an indication of the proportion of properties in disrepair. In this table, disrepair is based on the former Decent Homes Standard criteria which states that a dwelling fails this if it is not in a reasonable state of repair – this is based on the dwelling age and condition of a range of building components including walls, roofs, windows, doors, electrics and heating system

Issue		Owner-occupied properties (% of total)	Private rental sector properties (% of total)
HHSRS category 1 hazards	At least one hazard	10.7%	10.6%
	Excess cold	1.6%	1.7%
	Fall hazards	8.5%	7.5%
Disrepair		3.0%	4.1%
Fuel Poverty (Low-income, high costs)		8.8%	16.8%
Low-income households		12.1%	29.5%

The private sector stock condition survey estimated that highest concentration of all HHSRS hazards is found in the wards of Grays Thurrock, Little Thurrock Rectory, and East Tilbury, with the highest concentration of properties experiencing excess cold located in East Tilbury, Orsett and Grays Thurrock.

The above table also provides an estimate of the number of properties experiencing fuel poverty, using a measure that considers a household to be in fuel poverty if their required fuel costs are above average, or spending that amount would leave the household with a residual income below the official poverty line (considered in this data to be 60% of the median UK household income, after housing costs).

The wards of Tilbury St Chads, Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park, and Belhus featured the highest concentrations of households of fuel poverty in Thurrock.

Fuel poverty is driven by three main factors: low household incomes, high energy costs, and poor property energy efficiency such as insufficient insulation or ineffective heating systems.

Since 1 April 2020, landlords have no longer been able to let or continue to let properties covered by the Domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Regulations if the property has an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating below E, without a valid exemption in place. Band ratings are divided into bands A to G, with the band A representing the highest level of energy efficiency.

Through the stock condition survey 2.9% of privately owned dwellings and 2.9% of private rented dwellings in Thurrock were estimated to have an EPC rating below band E.

Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

HMOs can present greater risks to the health, safety, and wellbeing of residents than comparable single occupancy homes. Risks such as dangerous gas appliances, faulty electrical systems and inadequate means of escape and other fire precautions are examples of some of the hazards that the private housing team investigate in Thurrock on a regular basis.

We estimate that there are 2501 HMOs in Thurrock. Grays Riverside ward has the highest number of HMOs, followed by West Thurrock and South Stifford, and Grays Thurrock.

The below table presents estimates of the stock condition survey, comparing the risks and hazards of non-HMO rental sector properties to HMO private rental sector properties.

Issue		Non-HMO private rental sector properties (% of total)	HMO private rental sector properties (% of total)
HHSRS category 1 hazards	At least one hazard	10.4%	11.9%
	Excess cold	1.7%	2.1%
	Fall hazards	7.4%	8.4%
Disrepair		3.9%	5.3%
Fuel Poverty (Low-income, high costs)		17.6%	12.9%
Low-income households		29.2%	30.7%

Through the stock condition survey, we estimate that at least one category one hazard is present in 26% of HMOs in Grays Thurrock, 23% of HMOs in The Homesteads and 22% of HMOs in Little Thurrock Rectory. 12% of HMOs in Grays Thurrock are also estimated to be in disrepair

The purpose of licensing, especially for HMOs, is to ensure that residential accommodation within the private rented sector is safe, well managed and of good quality with a particular focus on safety.

A licence is needed for all properties that are occupied by five or more people, living together as two or more households. There are additional licensing rules for HMOs in certain areas in Thurrock until May 2024.

Disabled Facilities Grants

Mandatory disabled facilities grants (DFGs) are available from local authorities to fund or part-fund the completion of a range of adaptations for disabled occupants. DFGs are issued for works that are necessary and appropriate for the property to meet the needs of the disabled occupant, and that are reasonable and practicable to carry out. DFGs are tenure neutral.

Purposes for DFGs include works to facilitate access to and from the dwelling and any garden space, and access to or the provision of specific areas of a dwelling, such as the principal family room, a bedroom, appropriate personal hygiene facilities, and an appropriate space for food preparation and cooking. In addition, DFGs must be approved for works to make the dwelling safe for the disabled occupant and other persons residing with them.

The most prevalent harms removed in Thurrock properties between April 2019 and March 2021 as a result of disabled facilities grants were relating to personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage, falls with baths, and falls on stairs.

Impact

Property standards, regardless of tenure, affect the health and wellbeing of residents. The Marmot Review, published in 2010, concluded that housing is a 'social determinant of health', affecting and impacting upon physical and mental health inequalities throughout life.

Poor quality, sub-standard and unsafe private sector homes in Thurrock, whether owner-occupied or privately rented, are more likely to lead to injury and illness for residents than homes that are well-maintained and hazard free.

One in every ten private rental sector properties and just under one in every eight HMOs in Thurrock are estimated to have at least one category 1 HHSRS hazard, defined as hazards posing serious and immediate risks to the health and safety of residents.

The negative outcomes associated with such properties affect the quality of life of residents, place additional pressures on health and care services, and may lead to housing instability and insecurity for households seeking safer accommodation in the borough.

Although enforcement powers and measures are available to the council to use to tackle hazards in private properties, taking such action is largely reactive and only implemented following a report from an affected resident. In the private rental sector, tenants may be less likely to report any concerns to the council formally in fear of retaliatory eviction by their landlord. Except for HMOs under the mandatory and additional licensing schemes in Thurrock, there is no enforced structure for the proactive inspection of properties intended to be offered for rent. This means that hazards may exist in a property and remain unreported for some time, increasing the risk of harm for any resident living in that home.

These consequences are also applicable to households experiencing fuel poverty. Cold homes are associated with a range of poor health outcomes, including an increased risk of developing and exacerbating physical health conditions and mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

Home adaptations, supported by the effective and timely administration of DFGs in Thurrock, provide many benefits for individuals with disabilities. Changes to an individual's home can bring about significant enhancements to independence as well as overall health and wellbeing. Adaptations can also reduce the risks associated with a poorly accessible home, such as the risk of falls, hospital admissions, thereby reduce the need for the reliance on carers, or other informal and formal support such as residential care.

An accessible and well-adapted home can enable an adult or child with a disability to remain in their home for longer, with dignity and with pride, and the earlier this is achieved, the sooner the benefits can be realised.

Recent action

As a direct result of interventions by the Private Sector Housing team, 2642 category 1 and 2 hazards were removed from properties in Thurrock between 2018-19 and 2020-21.

The council was also awarded £61k in grants from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to tackle criminal landlords and drive up standards in the private rental sector.

An additional HMO licensing scheme was introduced in 2019 and has seen 213 HMOs licensed to date. Work to explore a selective licensing scheme for the private rental sector has also commenced.

Through proactive and targeted action, civil penalty fines have been used as a method of enforcement action, generating up to £220k for HMO and housing related offences.

Thurrock Council launched its Well Homes scheme in 2014 to improve the housing conditions and the health and well-being of residents living in private properties.

The Well Homes scheme:

- offers help to make homes safer by reducing the risk of ill health or accidents – for example, unsafe stairs or wiring, or providing improvements to your heating system
- puts residents in touch with health and lifestyle services that can improve quality of life – for example, help to stop smoking, health checks, debt advice, housing adaptations

The council secured a Warm Homes Fund grant of £453k for first time central heating systems under the ECO3 scheme and was allocated £1.8m under Local Authority Delivery Phase 2 (LAD2), a Government funded local-authority scheme that makes energy-saving improvements to the homes of people who struggle to pay their heating bills and keep their homes warm in the winter.

Between 2017-18 and 2020-21, the council awarded over £1.9m of Disabled Facilities Grants to 310 applicants to fund essential adaptations to give disabled people better freedom of movement into and around their homes, and to give access to essential facilities within the home.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will drive up the standards and quality of homes in the private sector in order to ensure greater availability of safe and suitable homes for Thurrock residents</p>	<p>We will develop targeted and data-driven interventions and work with private sector landlords to improve housing standards and living conditions for those renting in the private sector</p> <p>We will work with and support vulnerable owner-occupiers to remove HHSRS (Housing Health and Safety Rating System) hazards in their homes to support independent living and protect safety</p>	<p>Residents will have greater access to safe private sector homes, as well as to programmes such as Well Homes that have significant benefits to priority groups such as people living with long-term health conditions, physical disabilities and mental health needs.</p>

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will tackle hazards in the private rental sector in order to improve resident safety</p>	<p>We will continue to remove significant health and safety hazards from private rental sector properties by using the full extent of enforcement powers available to the council</p>	<p>Residents will be able to live in safe homes in the private rental sector with the confidence that any safety concerns can be raised with the council and appropriate action will be taken</p>
<p>We will encourage private sector residents to access available support in order to live independently in their homes for longer</p>	<p>We will encourage and signpost Disabled Facilities Grant usage where appropriate as a method to removing hazards and improve the health and wellbeing of households in Thurrock</p>	<p>Residents receiving Disabled Facilities Grants, regardless of tenure, will be empowered to live independently in their home by improving accessibility and removing hazards, thereby improving quality of life and reducing the risk of harm</p>
<p>We will develop a strategic approach to reduce fuel poverty in Thurrock in order to address the harm this causes to residents</p>	<p>We will develop a fuel poverty strategy for housing in Thurrock during the lifetime of this Housing Strategy and implement an action plan to address its causes and symptoms</p> <p>We will support improvements to the EPC ratings of private homes across the borough by designing and delivering initiatives targeted at poor energy efficiency</p> <p>We will use technology, data, and predictive analytics to identify and proactively support households at greatest risk of experiencing fuel poverty</p>	<p>Residents will benefit from proactive intervention and access support to improve the thermal and energy efficiency of their homes, removing the harms to health and wellbeing of cold homes and fuel poverty</p>

Invest in and maintain quality council-owned homes that are fit for the future

Context

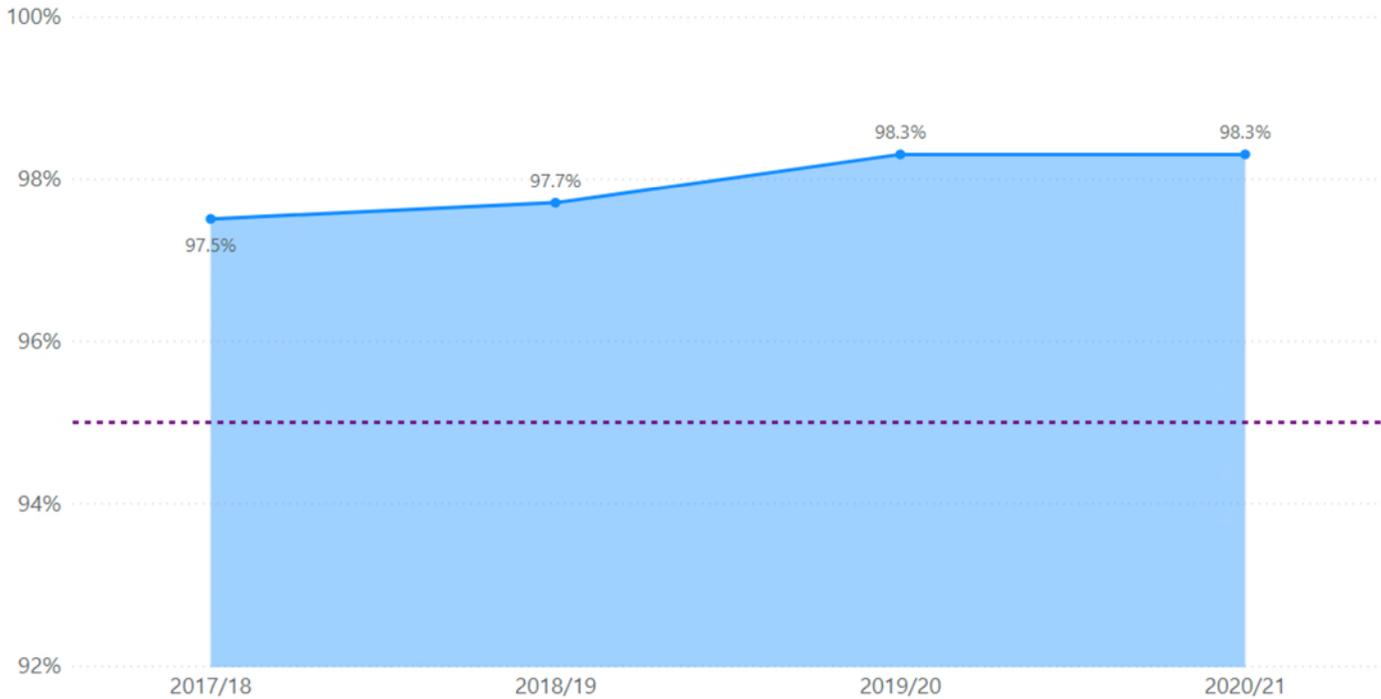
The council's aims for its homes and estates are that they should be places where residents enjoy living and working, where they take pride in their homes and can enjoy being part of a thriving community. The aspiration is to invest in and maintain high-quality accommodation that demonstrates the benefits of the council's repairs and capital investment programmes and positively influences the health and wellbeing of our tenants and residents.

The council owns and manages just under 10,000 homes, with some dating back to the late 19th Century, and its stock includes over 1,000 sheltered housing properties across the borough. Half of the council's general needs properties are three-bedroom homes, and the remaining majority comprise one and two-bedroom flats.

A 2017 stock condition survey demonstrated that the stock was in a fair to good condition with specific themes emerging such a need to prioritise work to property exteriors.

The council provides an effective and responsive day-to-day repairs and maintenance services that keep properties in good repair. The repairs service is delivered through third party contracts, providing a responsive repairs service to all housing tenants in line with government and locally set standards and timeframes. The chart below illustrates the percentage of responsive repairs completed within target timescales since 2017/18, evidencing the consistent strong performance of this area of work.

% Repairs Completed On Time by Year



Building and fire safety are matters of significant importance for any party or organisation involved in the management or maintenance of residential properties, and the responsibilities must not be taken lightly.

To meet its responsibilities, the council has a compliance regime to provide complete assurance to residents that their homes are well managed and meet required safety standards. Specific fire safety policies are in place to set how the housing service will manage and maintain its assets following the regulatory framework.

The housing service has begun to proactively develop an action plan to ensure that the council is in a strong position to meet and address the Social Housing White Paper proposals.

The housing service also stands ready to ensure compliance with the emerging Building Safety Bill, the implementation of recommendations made within the '*Building a Safer Future*' report following the Grenfell Tower fire, and any new duties or responsibilities introduced by the Fire Safety Act 2021. This aligns with the Charter for Social Housing Residents, as set out in the Social Housing White Paper.

Resident engagement is also crucial from the perspective of building management and safety. As part of the '*Building a safer future*' report published following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the introduction of a 'golden thread' was made. This golden thread aims to serve as a tool to manage buildings as holistic systems, allowing people to use information to design, construct and operate their buildings safely and effectively.

Damp and mould

Damp and mould in social housing is an issue across the UK. It is widely recognised as one of the most challenging aspects for landlords and residents to prevent and manage. It is for this reason that the Housing Ombudsman undertook a thematic review and recently published a report on this subject, entitled '*Spotlight on damp and mould – It's not lifestyle*'.

Analysis of council repairs data between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2021 shows that damp and mould repairs are relatively uncommon as a proportion of all repairs. During this time, 2242 responsive damp and mould repairs were completed, representing 4.1% of total repair demand.

During the reporting period, 2197 damp and mould related works orders were completed at 1,123 council-owned properties, reflecting 11.4% of the council's housing stock.

Further analysis of repairs data demonstrates that tenants of most of these properties only reported damp and mould once during the two-year period, with only 2% of those living in council's housing stock reporting damp and mould concerns more than once during this same period.

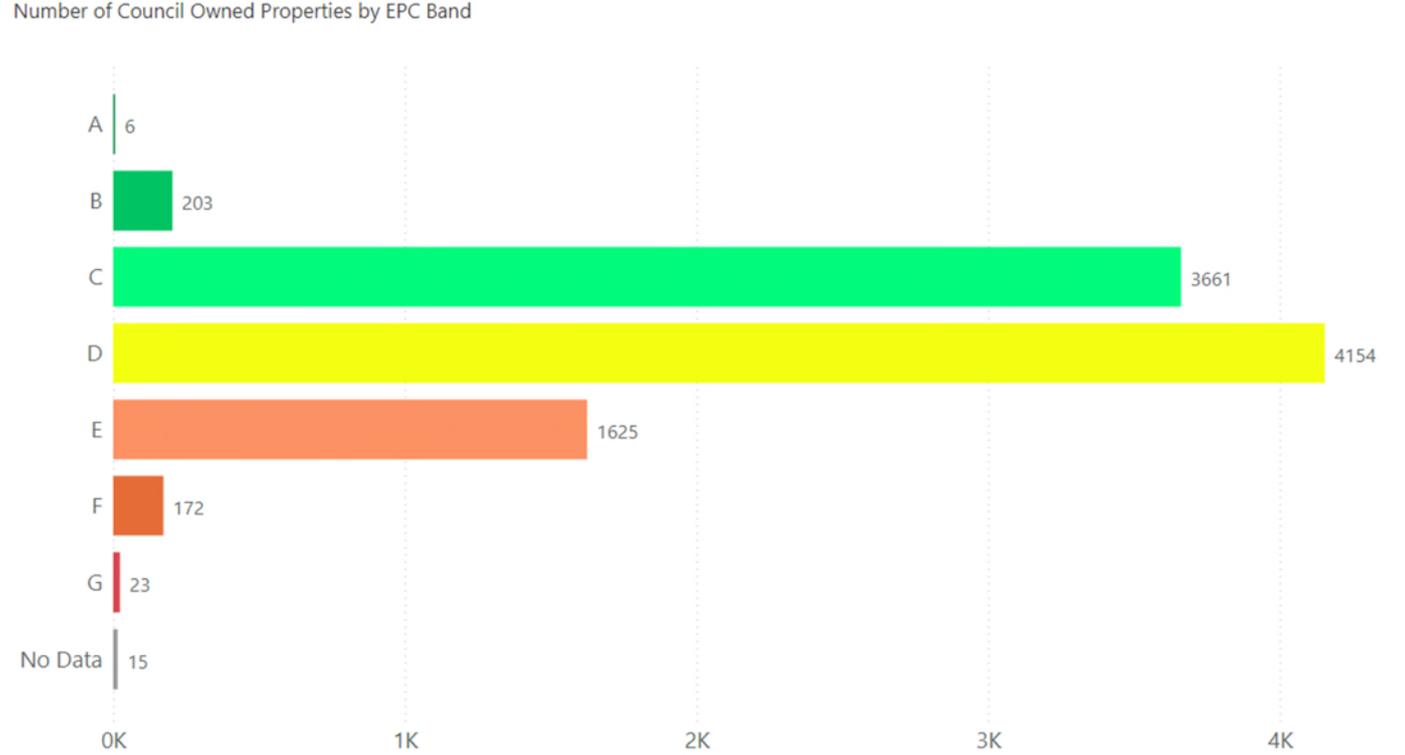
There are over five times as many damp and mould works orders completed in January compared to August and damp and mould issues are clearly positively associated with older stock which is less likely to be thermally well insulated. Both findings suggest that the primary cause of damp is condensation, where warm humid air inside the property condenses on cold walls, more commonly occurring in older properties, during the winter months.

The '*Spotlight on damp and mould – It's not lifestyle*' report produced 26 recommendations for landlords, including Thurrock Council to take into consideration for action to improve property conditions. The recommendation asks landlords to shift their approach to damp and mould:

- from reactive to proactive
- from inferring blame to taking responsibility
- from disrepair claims to resolution
- from complaints to a learning culture

Energy efficiency

Energy performance certificates (EPCs) are a rating scheme, summarising the energy efficiency of buildings. Assessed buildings are given ratings between A (very efficient) and G (inefficient). The assessment used to produce an EPC examines key items such as insulation, boilers, hot water tanks, radiators and heating controls, and windows. The below chart demonstrates the EPC ratings of properties within the council's housing stock.



As part of the Government's Clean Growth Strategy, all social housing providers are targeted with ensuring that 100% of homes within their stock have an EPC rating of C by 2030.

Decarbonisation

In October 2019, the council passed a motion to declare a climate emergency and to take urgent action to reduce its carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030. The council has committed to reducing its carbon footprint to zero. The council's initial plans to respond to the climate crisis is by making sure the council's operations are carbon neutral by 2030,

Over 34% of all emissions in the UK are attributed to the provision of heat. Electrification of heat is a key part of the Government's strategy for achieving net-zero carbon by 2050. Ground-source or air source heat pumps provide a solution to fully decarbonise heating in social housing assets coupled with the provision of clean energy. The installation of the low carbon heating systems is expected to provide at least a 70% reduction in carbon emissions.

The council is committed to continually investing to improve the overall thermal efficiency of homes, whilst effectively supporting the borough's most vulnerable residents out of fuel poverty. This strategy supports the decarbonisation agenda while improving the overall energy efficiency of the assets, ensuring the homes provide affordable thermal comfort.

To achieve this the council will review the performance of the existing housing assets and identify range of appropriate interventions for the various property archetypes within the borough. The council will ensure all retrofit works will be integrated into all asset investment plans, taking a fabric first approach to ensure they achieve the best outcomes value.

Impact

There is a clear requirement for ongoing investment in the council's stock to protect resident safety, provide good quality homes and meet the decarbonisation challenge.

The housing service must set a robust budget in order to meet the ongoing repairs, maintenance and stock improvement obligations. For 2022/23, a repairs and maintenance budget has been set at £12.893m.

The council must be committed to the management and investment required to tackle and minimise cases of damp and mould within residents' homes. It is recognised that it is not possible to fully eradicate the presence of damp and mould due to the array of factors that cause it; however, the council will need to ensure a fully coordinated approach to the ongoing prevention and management of this problem, put in place a policy for this aspect of property management and will work in line with the recommendations set out in the Housing Ombudsman report '*Spotlight on damp and mould – It's not lifestyle*'.

The funding requirements for the five-year capital investment programme between 2022/23 and 2026/27 has been identified as £105.839m. Of this, £51.500m has been identified for the ongoing Transforming Homes programme, £15.200m for decarbonisation of high-rise tower blocks, £8.254m for other carbon reduction works and £3.000m for the renewal of heating systems across the stock.

There will be further significant investment required in order to meet the carbon reduction targets. A report published by Savills in 2021 entitled Decarbonising the Housing Sector estimated average costs of £24,250 per flat and £37,060 per 3-bed houses would be required to meet the requirements. Current estimates based on figures produced for this strategy indicate that around 40% of all homes owned by Thurrock Council currently achieve the Clean Growth Strategy target of EPC band C.

The level of investment required to improve EPC ratings for the remaining proportion of properties by 2030 will far exceed the funds available in the HRA business plan, therefore the council will need to seek to maximise the use of available funding streams. In preparation, the council will develop an opportunity overview of funding streams and ensure schemes are 'bid ready'.

Recent action

Since 2017 capital works totalling over £46m have been undertaken across the council's housing stock to address priorities areas. The Transforming Homes programme, which ensures the council-owned homes meet the required standard, completed internal improvement targets in 2019 and moved on to prioritising the external refurbishment, including the replacement of any remaining single glazing. Between 2019/20 to 2020/21, 732 properties benefitted from external refurbishment and double-glazed window replacement, including street properties and 90 blocks of flats.

A new stock condition survey targeting a further 30% of the stock is being undertaken in the winter months of 2021/22. The aim is to update overall stock condition data rather than diagnose specific

repairs and defects, which the council would be made aware of through day-to-day reporting processes. The survey targets the winter months to gain an accurate picture of any properties suffering from seasonal damp or mould problems. The outcome of this survey will further inform the investment programmes over the next 5-30 years.

A pilot was launched to support the safety of vulnerable residents living in the council's high-rise blocks. It introduced personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) that detail the support required for a resident who would be unable to independently leave their property if required in the event of an emergency. The effectiveness of these will be reviewed, and consideration will be given to the broader adoption of these documents across the council's housing stock in advance of any mandatory instruction by the Government.

The council has introduced a proactive approach to identifying properties experiencing damp and mould. Rather than relying solely on residents raising repair requests, new questions have been introduced in the general perception, repairs, gas repairs, gas servicing and new tenancy surveys undertaken on behalf of the council to seek out instances of damp and mould.

Through these questions, residents are asking if they have damp and mould in their property, if they have reported it, and if there is any action required to resolve. If a concern is reported, an alert is sent directly to the repairs quality assurance team, triaged, and sent to repairs contractor to raise a repair. This new approach was introduced as a direct result of the council's engagement with the Housing Ombudsman study and report produced on the subject of damp and mould.

It is estimated that this question will be asked in approximately 9,000 surveys per year. Residents are generally surveyed only once within any six-month period to prevent survey fatigue.

Residents who have suffered from damp and mould in their homes are given advice on the ongoing management of the home environment. This is delivered through resident liaison visits and the provision of printed information. The Council offer this advice in a supportive manner to help residents to live in their homes without the reoccurrence of mould and is alongside remedies to any structural defects, if found. In some cases, residents have raised concerns because they feel that the responsibility lies with the Council as a landlord, but to successfully eradicate damp in any home, some household management is required.

The council's resident liaison officers (RLOs) have been trained by the national fuel poverty charity NEA. In addition to advising on how to best manage the home environment, they are able to help residents to understand how to manage their resources and their heating systems. Where necessary the RLO help can help residents claim fuel poverty grants and liaise with our financial inclusion officers to ensure they are accessing all the financial support they are entitled to.

Between April 2019 and March 2021 £408,961 has been invested in servicing of mechanical ventilation and heat recovery units, repairing and replacing rainwater goods and completing the repair works under the specific mould remediation and prevention programme. A total of 4820 properties have benefited from these works.

In addition, the council invested £5,219,307 in improving overall building efficiency. These works included the replacement of central heating boilers in 1807 homes, the replacement of windows and/or doors in 331 homes and to replace the roof and improve insulation for 87 homes.

In February 2022 it was announced that the council would receive £3.2m following a successful bid under the first wave of the social housing decarbonisation fund. This funding has been specifically awarded to deliver a new ground-source heat pump project to the three high-rise tower

blocks in Chadwell St Mary. It will connect all 273 individual flats to a shared ground loop heat pump system, replacing older and less efficient storage radiators and hot water systems within these three high-rise residential tower blocks.

All of the properties at the council's most recent new build developments – Bruyns Court, The Echoes, Bracelet Close, Alma Court and Heathlyn Close – have EPC ratings of at least C. 23% of these new build properties have this rating, with 75.2% rated B and 1.8% achieving A ratings.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
We will listen to the views of residents and understand their priorities in order to design, develop and deliver stock improvement programmes that target the things that matter	We will proactively engage with residents on their experiences of living in council-owned properties and their priorities for making homes fit for the future by embedding active engagement into the design of asset investment	Residents will be able to have their voices heard and priorities understood regarding what matters to them in future investment programmes in their homes and estates
We will invest in and embed new asset management technology in order to effectively direct housing investment for maintenance and improvement	<p>We will implement an integrated asset management solution and load the results of the 2021/22 stock condition survey to form the foundation for investment modelling and the design of planned maintenance programmes and monitor compliancy</p> <p>We will introduce BIM to support the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of council assets, and explore smart technology and IoT (Internet of things) solutions to enable real-time monitoring of stock condition</p>	<p>Residents living in council-owned homes will benefit from fiscally responsible property improvements that deliver value for money and improvements to living conditions</p> <p>Through BIM, residents will experience improvements in the ability of the council to respond to and resolve maintenance and repairs concerns in applicable buildings</p> <p>Residents will benefit from the use of IoT through unintrusive solutions, allowing the council to be alerted to stock condition issues affecting the property and for remedial action to be arranged swiftly and proactively</p>

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will embed proactivity in the approach to maintaining council-owned homes in order to achieve a good standard and mitigate the need for reactive repairs</p>	<p>We will identify properties requiring significant investment over the next five to ten years by using detailed stock analysis and findings from the 2021/22 stock condition survey</p> <p>We will use this information to inform plans for planned and cyclical maintenance programmes to ensure properties are safe and comply with legislative requirements with components serviced regularly to extend their lifespan and reduce the need for reactive repairs</p>	<p>Residents will live in well maintained homes, benefitting from investment at the right time and reducing the disruption of responsive repairs due to the failure of components</p>
<p>We will proactively share information relating to building and fire safety in order to support residents to feel safe in their homes</p>	<p>We will develop a communications plan to ensure consistency in the approach taken by the council in communicating about safety</p> <p>We will use the plan as an opportunity to share information with residents about how their building operates and the steps and actions, they can take to protect their safety within the home</p>	<p>Residents will be supported to better understand their homes in the context of building and fire safety to address any concerns they may have about the safety of their building and prevent them from experiencing harm in the event of any incident</p>

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will develop a holistic approach to damp and mould in council-owned properties in order to significantly reduce occurrences</p>	<p>We develop and deliver against an action plan based upon the recommendations set out in the Housing Ombudsman <i>Spotlight on damp and mould</i> report, including a dedicated policy for this aspect of property management</p> <p>We will analyse the data from a stock condition survey undertaken in the winter months of 2021/22 to gain an accurate picture of any properties suffering from seasonal damp or mould problems</p> <p>We will ensure a fully coordinated approach with partners to the ongoing prevention and management of damp and mould and embed technology, modelling and predictive analytics to identify properties likely to be experiencing these issues</p>	<p>Residents will experience fewer instances of damp and mould in their properties as a result of the proactive approach to identification based on stock condition survey data and predictive analytics, allowing preventative work to be carried out in their home</p> <p>Where instances of damp and mould do occur, residents will receive support free of the stigma and judgement traditionally associated with the term 'lifestyle' in the context of this issue</p>
<p>We will support residents out of fuel poverty in order to improve health and wellbeing and quality of life</p>	<p>We will achieve EPC band C ratings across all housing stock by 2030 through direct investment in council homes from the housing revenue account and maximising the use of available funding streams</p> <p>We will ensure that officers undertake fuel poverty awareness training and are provided with the tools and knowledge to best support residents</p>	<p>Residents will benefit from proactive intervention, significant investment and access support to improve the thermal and energy efficiency of their homes, removing the harms to health and wellbeing of cold homes and fuel poverty</p>

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will increase the use of sustainable and renewable technology in our stock in order to improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and support the council's green agenda</p>	<p>We will support the shift away from the use of fossil fuels by installing new, renewable technologies for heating and hot water needs in new developments</p> <p>We will reduce carbon emissions in the new build developments through installing renewable energy sources, using well-insulated materials in the new homes, fitting LED lights and installing efficient communal heating and hot water systems</p> <p>We will replace the electric storage radiators to 273 properties in three high rise blocks to provide a more efficient heating system linked to a ground source heat pump</p> <p>We will work with the council's suppliers and partners to reduce their carbon footprint, considering carbon emissions and contributions towards achieving net-zero when undertaking procurement activity</p>	<p>Residents will live in new and existing homes that have higher levels of thermal and energy efficiency, leading to reduced household costs relating to energy bills and more effective heating and lighting systems that are fit for the future</p>

Strengthen community safety and prevent anti-social behaviour

Context

The council holds considerable responsibilities to protect its residents from crime and anti-social behaviour by providing strategy, policy, and frontline enforcement services.

Crime is a broad and complex issue, impacting upon the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors, and wider society. Abuse and exploitation have the greatest and longer lasting impacts on victims and survivors.

Anti-social behaviour is any act that causes – or is likely to cause – harassment, alarm, or distress. It is also any act that can cause nuisance or annoyance related either to housing or the affected person's occupation of their home.

The quality of the local environment is impacted in part by anti-social behaviour in Thurrock. Examples include littering, nuisance vehicles, and drug dealing and use. These factors impact on perceptions among the community of safety and the interest in communities to enjoy their local area.

The *Charter for Social Housing Residents* sets out that every social housing resident should have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in. In relation to anti-social behaviour, it outlines that social housing tenants have a right to feel safe in their homes, without the stress, fear, and tensions that anti-social behaviour and crime can cause and encourages landlords to develop practical solutions to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in their areas.

The topic of anti-social behaviour featured heavily as a priority throughout the engagement for the development of this strategy, with particular concerns raised regarding the perception of feeling unsafe.

Most crimes remain unreported for several reasons. Instances of abuse and exploitation remain particularly hidden, leading to challenges in identifying, safeguarding, and supporting those who experience these harms.

The ways in which crimes are committed is changing. Greater sophistication and use of technology have further enabled crimes such as online abuse, exploitation, scams, fraud and drug trafficking. This requires us to constantly adapt our approaches to preventing crime, protecting, and safeguarding our residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Certain groups are more likely to be the victims of crime, including women and girls, children and young people, the elderly and those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Crimes disproportionately affecting these groups include but are not limited to domestic violence and abuse, sexual violence and abuse, hate crime, fraud, scams and cuckooing, as well as other forms of abuse and exploitation.

The rates of recorded violent crimes are higher in Thurrock compared to England and have risen sharply since 2013. The Thurrock Youth Offending Service are seeing young people with a more entrenched pattern of offending, further exacerbated by gang activity within the borough and an increase in the county lines model of offending. Concerns are also noted regarding the use of knives and weapons.

Thurrock's Community Safety Partnership brings together local organisations with the shared goals of reducing crime and the fear of crime, anti-social behaviour, alcohol and drug misuse and reducing re-offending.

The 2022/23 priorities for the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership are:

- tackling disproportionality in relation to violence against women and girls – including sexual offences, stalking and rape, whilst recognising that men and boys can also be victims
- breaking the cycle of domestic abuse – in line with the domestic abuse duty and needs assessment
- violence and vulnerability – tackling gang related activity and offensive weapons to reduce drug driven violence
- counter extremism and terrorism – preventing violent extremism locally
- reduce harm to and safeguard victims from hate crime – including gender-based hate crime (misogyny and misandry)
- tackling community based anti-social behaviour and safeguarding victims – including off road motorbike nuisance
- human trafficking and modern-day slavery and organised immigration crime
- safer streets through increased visibility and community engagement
- tackling offending – reducing high volume crimes – for example, burglary

Impact

Fear of crime is linked to poorer mental health and lower quality of life and can also be barrier to engaging in health improving activities outdoors – for example, walking and running. Consistently heightened stress levels caused by feeling unsafe can also lead to a range of health problems. Those with poor health and fear of crime are more likely to suffer repeat victimisation. We want people feeling safer within their communities and increase public perceptions of safety.

Experiencing crime can have significant impacts on physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing. These impacts are often dependent on the type of crime experienced and potentially affect many aspects of their life, including their housing, education, finances, and ability to work. Impacts can persist long after the abuse has ended with wider impacts including the effects on the victims' loved ones as well as societal impacts on the health service, social care and criminal justice system.

We want to improve our local, joined up response to crime, particularly abuse and exploitation. This includes improving approaches to prevention, responses to disclosure and providing victims/survivors with access to appropriate and holistic support that is trauma informed where appropriate.

Recent action

An action was undertaken in 2021/22 to implement a new noise nuisance reporting app, aimed at reducing duplication and allowing residents to report issues with greater ease. This has been implemented, offering an effective alternative to diaries and logs which would have been used traditionally.

Across the council, work is underway to develop and implement a new Community Safety Operating Model to improve the council's delivery of its community safety partnership strategy.

In conjunction with this, a new Community Safety Service is being developed. It will bring together the CCTV and Concierge teams from the housing service under a single structure along with the anti-social behaviour, community engagement, environmental enforcement, and civil enforcement teams.

Proposals have also been made to develop a new integrated centre for crime and enforcement (ICCE) within a central location that will house an advanced CCTV, command and control capability, supported by police and new community safety officers.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will work in partnership to reduce local levels of crime and opportunities for crime to take place in order to reduce the number of victims of crime and make Thurrock a safer place to live</p>	<p>We will work across the organisation to form a new <i>Community Safety Service</i> for Thurrock</p> <p>We will support the implementation of a new <i>Community Safety Operating Model</i> to improve the council's delivery of its Community Safety Partnership Strategy and a new <i>Integrated Centre for Crime and Enforcement</i> (ICCE) supported by police and new Community Safety Officers</p> <p>We will work across housing services to support the priorities identified by Thurrock Community Safety Partnership annually</p> <p>We will combat fly-tipping in our estates through targeted responses and enforcement powers where necessary</p>	<p>Residents will feel safer in their homes and neighbourhoods in Thurrock, resulting in improvements to quality of life and more positive perceptions of the local area</p>

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will work in partnership to prevent and deter crime for those with increased risk of experiencing crime in order to better protect their safety and wellbeing</p>	<p>We will promote the Stay Safe Campaign, delivering multi-agency pop-up events to promote the safety of women travelling around the borough late at night</p> <p>We will develop a multi-agency data monitoring tool to ensure all reports of anti-social behaviour to all community safety agencies, can be identified. The tool will assist with identifying trends and analysis of data on repeat victims and perpetrators, including hate incidents and crimes</p>	<p>Residents who would otherwise be more likely to experience crime will feel safer and be at a reduced risk of harm</p>
<p>We will improve the local response to supporting victims/survivors of crimes to improve their health and wellbeing</p>	<p>We will improve the local response to victims of anti-social behaviour and crime to improve their health and wellbeing using a person-centred approach</p>	<p>Affected residents will be supported to ensure that underlying trauma is not left unresolved, and interventions promote and result in the resolution of issues</p>
<p>We will adopt new technology in order to better to record and monitor antisocial behaviour incidents and outcomes</p>	<p>We will invest in and develop a Power BI dashboard to monitor real-time outcome data, and employ innovative technical solutions to improve ways to report and record antisocial behaviour incidents for residents</p> <p>We will develop an evidence and data-led approach to understanding the wider impact of anti-social behaviour and reduce the risk of harm to residents and communities</p> <p>We will examine data to focus on the effective anti-social behaviour interventions and update processes</p>	<p>Residents will experience timely and coordinated approaches to addressing and investigating their antisocial behaviour concerns</p> <p>Residents will benefit from the introduction of a data-led approach to tackling anti-social behaviour as it will provide evidence for more effective actions that can be taken to resolve their concerns</p>

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will communicate effectively about action taken to tackle anti-social behaviour in order to reassure residents</p>	<p>We will ensure direct, effective, and rapid responses to reports of anti-social behaviour and focus on reassurance and publicity for positive outcomes</p>	<p>Residents will be encouraged to make reports of anti-social behaviour concerns as a result of evidence of positive outcomes</p> <p>Those reporting concerns will feel better supported due to swift and effective communication, mitigating any anxiety or uncertainty after submitting their report or concern</p>
<p>We will embed safety principles in new developments in order to reduce the likelihood of crime or anti-social behaviour in the future</p>	<p>We will continue to deliver new council-owned developments to 'Secured by Design' standards</p>	<p>Residents living in new council-owned developments will feel safer and experience fewer concerns relating to crime at home and in their local area</p>

Tackle domestic and sexual abuse and violence

Context

Domestic abuse and sexual abuse are still largely hidden crimes and measuring the true scale of the issue is complex. Domestic abuse and sexual abuse happen in all communities, regardless of:

- gender
- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- race
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation
- marriage or civil partnership
- pregnancy or maternity

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was passed into law in April 2021. The Act provided a new statutory definition of domestic abuse, introduced new laws and changes to existing laws, and placed new duties on local authorities, the Government, and other public bodies, such:

- the provision of safe accommodation for all survivors of domestic abuse
- ensuring that fleeing abuse does not result in the loss of right to lifetime or assured tenancies when these were in place
- ensuring that homeless people identified as survivors of domestic abuse are given priority

Domestic abuse and sexual abuse disproportionately affect women. Often the abuse is perpetrated by men and is more likely to happen to women who have a disability.

Information collected by Thurrock Refuge between April 2018 and March 2021 indicates that 295 victims of domestic abuse were provided with safe accommodation – 120 refuge clients with 175 children. The average age of domestic abuse victims in safe accommodation was 35, however the ages ranged from 21 to 71.

72% of those provided accommodation had children, and 7% were pregnant. 88% of Thurrock Refuge clients were British nationals, however 5% of clients had no recourse to public funds.

The top four areas (unitary or district level local authority) where Thurrock's Refuge residents were most likely to come from were Southend-on-Sea (13%), Thurrock (11%), Basildon (10%) and Barking and Dagenham (8%). Combined, these areas made up approximately two-fifths of all victims staying in Thurrock.

There is a strong association within some data sets and the deprivation levels across wards in Thurrock. On average, 52% of residents in safe accommodation in Thurrock were unemployed while approximately 42% of residents' employment status was unrecorded in the same time frame, based on a three-year cohort.

The unemployment rate is high which could be for a range of reasons, such as mental health needs, or given that 5% of residents required an interpreter and 9% of residents' first language was not English these may also be potential barriers in accessing and navigating employment or being financially able to continue to alternative accommodation.

Individuals identifying themselves as having a disability was an emerging trend in the data. Although numerically small, there is limited understanding of these needs and therefore requires greater focus. Mental health support emerged as the largest need for residents, corroborated by the understanding that emotional or psychological and jealous or controlling behaviour abuse types affected over half of residents each year.

The Domestic Abuse Act has defined children as victims in their own right, therefore data recording across agencies will have to capture this with greater accuracy for future assessments. The specific needs of children residing in refuge is not known and will be a focus for future assessments.

This assessment has highlighted that there is a need for a regular multi-agency analytical product, overlaying partnership data sets and reviewing them all together rather individually within own organisations. This would be of significant benefit to the local domestic abuse partnership board in assisting the local authority to deliver the duties under the Domestic Abuse Act.

'No space or capacity to provide support' was the second most recorded reason for being refused safe accommodation. There is a lack of specialised accommodation for minority groups or individuals who face additional barriers to reporting or for those who cannot/may not feel comfortable residing in current safe accommodation provision, such as males and LGBTQ+ people.

Impact

The recent assessment of the needs of domestic abuse victims residing in safe accommodation in Thurrock identified a number of characteristics and support needs of residents living in Thurrock Refuge. The following broad actions were recommended in order to appropriately meet these needs:

- improve provision to meet the needs of those residing in safe accommodation
- review current safe accommodation options to increase accessibility for all
- improve data collection and data sharing

As with many other areas of this strategy, the under provision of safe, suitable and affordable accommodation in Thurrock for those with specific support needs is a factor in limiting positive outcomes for survivors of domestic and sexual abuse and violence.

Challenges evidenced in this strategy regarding the provision of safe and stable housing for those fleeing abuse, include:

- a lack of social housing stock to meet 'move on' needs
- turning to private sector renting can contribute to financial instability and insecure tenure
- engagement with specific groups requires different approaches to improve underreporting

Extending safe accommodation buildings and capital spending is outside of the Domestic Abuse Act new burdens funding remit, however this has emerged as gap in current service within Thurrock and will require further exploration.

Recent action

The council has conducted a review its of policies and processes to achieve DAHA accreditation – the benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse. Through this work, a new Domestic Abuse policy has been developed.

To reflect the council's commitment to tackling domestic abuse, the policy introduces several measures to ensure that residents receive a dedicated approach, considering the circumstance of each individual and always upholding best practice.

The policy sets out that residents can expect the council to:

- get our response right first time
- work with specialist services
- be flexible in our approach
- assist and guide survivors to obtain tailored support
- ensure survivors can remain in their property if they wish through the sanctuary scheme
- safeguard survivors and their families
- take a survivor centred approach
- adopt a coordinated multi-agency response
- proactively engage with 'hard-to-reach' groups
- promote awareness of our zero tolerance support services
- assist survivors to find alternative safe accommodation, and continue to provide support
- ensure staff safety

Work to achieve the DAHA accreditation will continue into Spring and Summer 2022 and will demonstrate the council's commitment and coordinated community response to domestic abuse in areas such as case and risk management, inclusivity and accessibility, partnership working, and publicity and awareness.

Case study – Survivor-centred approach

A Tenancy Management Officer referred Client C to the Housing Safeguarding Team, following a disclosure of domestic abuse from her partner. Client C had mobility difficulties and her partner was her carer. Together, they held a joint tenancy and lived in a ground floor property.

The couple had left this property due issues within the neighbourhood and told the council that they had been targeted. Initially, they both moved into Client C's parents' home, however when she disclosed the domestic abuse that she had experienced from her partner, he left the property and the relationship ended.

The domestic abuse (DA) officer completed a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment and identified a medium risk. The DA officer then completed a tailored intervention and safety plan based on conversations around the outcome of the assessment. Client C's parents were homeowners and had installed CCTV. As such, Client C felt safe there, however it was not appropriate for her long-term accommodation. A key part of the plan was to achieve independence for Client C with support for her mobility challenges.

The DA officer working alongside Client C asked if she would consider a sole tenancy, with any required adaptations provided in the property. Client C had not reported the domestic abuse to the police and did not wish to. She also shared that she did not wish to return to the joint tenancy;

another key part of the intervention and safety plan was to ensure that Client C did not become homeless as a result.

The DA Officer arranged to complete some one-to-one sessions with Client C to help build her confidence and understand the effect of DA on self-esteem. During the first session, they completed the 'empowerment star' – a method of learning and rebuilding confidence, assisting to jointly understand the help and support required. Client C completed a genogram, helping to identify the nature of the relationships they have within their family members.

We understood that the domestic abuse had affected the positive family relationships, and as these had broken down the support which could have been offered by these relationships was absent.

Through the sessions, Client C was able to see that the break-up of her relationship with her partner was due to his abusive behaviour and decided she would report to the police. Client C was assisted to make a report to 101 and the DA officer arranged to be present when she gave her statement. While she was giving her statement, Client C also disclosed sexual abuse from her ex-partner. A referral to SERICC (South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre) was made, and they were able to offer the specialist support relating to with the sexual abuse she had experienced.

The DA officer worked with an anti-social behaviour (ASB) officer to take possession action on the joint tenancy on the grounds of DA. The therapeutic tools and Client C's statement was used to evidence the domestic abuse and the civil court granted possession of the joint tenancy to the council.

This was the first time the council had taken possession action on the grounds of DA in the housing service. Client C was awarded a sole tenancy and is living an independent life, rebuilding her positive and supportive family relationships.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will commit to tackling domestic and sexual abuse effectively, professionally, and appropriately in order to achieve the best outcomes for survivors of abuse</p>	<p>We will implement and embed the new Housing Domestic Abuse policy, introducing measures to ensure that residents receive a dedicated approach that considers the circumstances of each individual and always upholds best practice</p> <p>We will deliver expert advice through a single route to support regarding housing, skills, employment, and other needs of people experiencing or who have experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse and/or violence</p>	<p>Residents experiencing domestic and sexual abuse and violence will be supported using a person-centred, human and holistic approach</p>

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will work to improve pathways into safe accommodation in order to best support those fleeing abuse</p>	<p>We will review and revise the existing joint protocol for supporting those at risk of homelessness because they are fleeing domestic and sexual abuse through a coordinated approach with all those who are stakeholders</p> <p>We will improve access to safe and stable housing for survivors of domestic and sexual abuse and violence, across all housing tenure types by sourcing new accommodation options and improving existing properties and by developing housing options and initiatives to give people the choice to either relocate or remain in their existing accommodation</p>	<p>Residents fleeing abuse will be able to access safe, secure and affordable accommodation that meets their needs at the point of move on and into the future, and are able to exercise choice in determining the outcome in line with their vision for a good life</p>

Support vulnerable adults and children into housing

Context

There is an urgent need to reform the accommodation and care pathway for vulnerable residents in Thurrock, such as those with mental illness, and those leaving care.

The role that housing plays in mental health support for individuals is crucial. Therefore, providing the right type of housing is fundamental to the help individuals to recover and live well in their community, as well as reducing demand on statutory services.

Accommodation and care for individuals with the highest levels of need coupled with challenging behaviour has been identified as the most difficult to source and sustain in Thurrock.

The accommodation and care provision for individuals in Thurrock with mental illness consists of residential care, supported living and floating support. Anecdotal evidence across housing, health and social care indicates that there is a gap in provision for a 'missing middle' – people with needs that are too complex and challenging for supported living and are inappropriate for residential care, and for whom the gap between general needs housing and supported living is too great.

The current model does not accommodate the fluctuating needs of people with mental illness. Unlike other groups, mental illness is not a linear condition and without the right support and boundaries may result in instances of frequent admissions and placement breakdowns. An individual may require one or all levels a model of accommodation and care provision, at different times, for short or long periods of time. The majority will require a multi-agency approach to their support in the community; however, when this support is delivered directly by each responsible agency can add to the feeling of overwhelm and chaos for the individual.

Locally, there are instances of multiple high-cost placements that do not deliver the quality and outcomes aspired to. A lack of concerted focus on achieving what is important to the individual and little opportunity to review plans and adapt, mostly occurring at times of crisis, has led to a drive to transform supported living.

Local authorities have a duty, as a corporate parent, to ensure continued involvement in supporting young people as they leave care and move into independence until they are 25 years of age. This approach should mean that bureaucratic processes are overridden, and decisions are made with the child's needs in mind and as a priority.

Young people in care and leaving care can be highly vulnerable and at risk of experiencing multiple accommodation moves. They can often struggle to cope with the challenges of living independently at a young age without a family network, and they may need help to access services or deal with specific problems they face. Unfortunately for some this means they may end up at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Good practice guidance published by the Government in 2020 recommends that council housing departments and children's services should produce a joint protocol that sets out how they will work together to ensure:

- each care leaver has a tailored support plan as they transition to independent living
- those at risk of homelessness are identified early and action is taken to prevent it
- a quick, safe, and joined up response for care leavers who go on to become homeless

Impact

Current approaches to supported living experience a gap in provision, as outlined in the above section. The consequences of this are felt throughout the system in terms of delays to discharges and the provision of appropriate levels of support. Additionally, and more importantly for the individuals, this can lead to multiple placements in relatively short periods of time, out of borough placements leading to disconnect with their community and support systems, and spiralling costs.

Although there is an established pathway in place for care leavers through Head Start Housing, this initiative was not introduced to be the sole route into accommodation, meaning that there are care leavers whose needs are either being under or over-provided for through this route, resulting in the ineffective use of resource and impacting on the possible deliver of positive outcomes.

Properly directed investment of resources in appropriate housing related support services for vulnerable adults and children can eliminate waste and generate savings across the entire system, in addition to the fundamental benefits for individuals regarding choice, control, and independence in their lives.

Recent action

In March 2016, children's services and the housing service developed a strategic partnership to support Thurrock's young people to access suitable accommodation at affordable rates.

In December 2018, Head Start Housing was launched, aiming to provide suitable accommodation for Thurrock's care leavers and a safe space to live and learn before moving on to a private rental or social housing tenancy. It has a portfolio of properties ranging from one to five-bedrooms, with varying levels of floating support to 24/7 provision.

The skills and behaviours of each care leaver are considered alongside their needs to enable selection of the right type of accommodation. Care leavers receive support from their personal adviser and from the Head Start Housing officer who ensures the property is and remains compliant with health and safety, is furnished with essential items, has access to wifi, and that utility bills are paid.

Care leavers are supported to access housing benefit and, when they are ready, education, employment or training using the home as a foundation.

The housing service made a commitment to provide spaces for 30 individuals to Head Start Housing by end of 2023, and by the end of 2021, 24 spaces had been identified.

The Head Start Housing strategy made provision to return as many care leavers as possible to accommodation in Thurrock by the end of 2023. For care leavers in education or with established networks out of borough, Head Start Housing remains committed to provide suitable accommodation out of borough and fulfils the council's legal obligation to do so.

Considerable progress has been made in the past three years, and the Head Start Housing Strategy has been refreshed to shape and drive positive change over the next 5 years.

An integrated primary and community care (IPCC) locality model has been developed in response to challenges facing the delivery of mental health services. Practitioners such as social workers and LACs frequently feel frustration as a point of contact for people defined as the 'missing middle' but are subsequently unable to help until people were ill enough to meet the thresholds in place.

More broadly, it was recognised that the way mental health services had been organised left residents with a service that was difficult to access, fragmented and that focused on only biomedical aspects of treatment.

The new model has focused on:

- developing a seamless offer for those who need more support than primary care would provide but do not meet the thresholds for secondary care
- defining care packages to meet the needs of those in Outpatient caseloads to enable clinically safe transfer of care to the Primary Care Network Integrated Mental Health Teams with an embedded step-up and step-down function with a particular focus on psychological interventions
- releasing capacity for the consultants to provide additional support to the Primary Care Networks and develop a more therapeutic service offer for those with complex needs ensuring quality specialist and personalised care
- developing a holistic offer that allowed wider determinants of mental health such as housing and employment to be addressed together with the positive role that social and community connections can play in recovery

The new model provides an inclusive and integrated service that blurs the previous hard referral boundaries between primary and secondary care, providing specialist support to practices, holistic support to residents and reduces the number of onward referrals and fragmentation within the previous system.

Having successfully piloted the model in one PCN, we are currently in the process of rolling out to all four at pace.

Thurrock Council has actively supported and participated in the Government's Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme. A cross-organisational group was established to ensure a coordinated approach and private sector landlords were engaged to supply appropriate properties for this project.

The Well Homes team in the housing service has provided landlords and new tenants with support to ensure the smooth running of tenancies, as well as ongoing resettlement support after arrival in the UK. This support includes help with medical needs, arranging English lessons if required, setting up bank accounts, finding jobs and getting children into education.

The council has successfully worked to increase the amount of council-owned temporary accommodation located in the borough in recent years and has taken significant steps to date which includes the purchase of Brook House, now operating as a ten-unit temporary accommodation hostel. Feedback to date from households currently placed in Brook House has been positive with regards to the support and advice from officers and the quality of accommodation.

Thurrock Council has also been operating a Housing First programme for a number of years. This programme provides intensive support to people who are long term or recurrently homeless and have high ongoing support needs. The project has so far successfully supported seven individuals who were homeless or threatened with homelessness. They had faced persistent barriers to

accessing housing, some of which were caused by a variety of health conditions and addictions resulting in complex needs.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
We will improve the supported and specialist housing offer in Thurrock in order to address shortfalls for vulnerable residents	We will work across the broader health, care, and housing system to better understand the gaps in supported and specialist housing provision in the borough and work towards meeting these needs	Residents will be able to access accommodation with the right level of support or care to empower them to live independently as possible in their local community Residents will be able to access support at the right level at the right time as a result of expanding the availability and range of supported housing provision
We will align housing staff with Integrated Locality Networks in order to implement an integrated approach to care and support planning	We will align housing allocations and homelessness staff within single Integrated Locality Networks around each Primary Care Network to design and implement an integrated approach to care planning, delivering bespoke solutions to residents with mental health problems that address their housing, addiction, mental health and other needs at the same time	Residents with mental health problems will experience fewer barriers and thresholds to securing appropriate accommodation as all support needs will be considered through a holistic, person-centred approach
We will continue to support the Head Start Housing initiative in order to provide suitable accommodation for care leavers as a foundation for their future	We will provide a further ten properties below market rental rates with space for 22 individuals to the Head Start Housing initiative by the end of 2027	More residents leaving care will have the opportunity to receive support from Head Start Housing where this is the approach most appropriate to their personal circumstances and needs

Improve estate standards

Context

As a landlord, the council is responsible for managing and maintaining large areas of communal space, both indoors and out.

The *Charter for Social Housing Residents* seeks to ensure that all social housing residents can enjoy good homes and neighbourhoods. Through the white paper, the Government states it would review the Decent Homes Standard and consider whether it needs to be updated to ensure it is delivering what is needed for safety and decency now.

In the white paper the Government went further, outlining that the Decent Homes Standard review would also consider how improvements to communal space around social homes could make places more liveable, safe, and comfortable.

Around 3,500 council-owned properties are located on estates or in areas with outside communal space that the housing service is responsible for maintaining.

Feedback from Thurrock residents during the development of this strategy included concerns about feeling safe in and around the borough's neighbourhoods, in particular relating to anti-social behaviour, drug crime and misuse, road and footpath safety, and inadequate street lighting.

Residents expressed that improvements to specific estates and neighbourhoods should be made following engagement with those who live in those areas, ensuring that local needs, priorities and concerns are fully considered.

Through recent satisfaction survey activity, the responses of tenants who gave satisfaction ratings of 'fairly dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' were analysed. 40.9% of the dissatisfied responses related to the quality of work carried out, specifically relating to standards of cleaning and litter either not being picked up or left behind. 34.1% was due to the frequency of the caretaking, with perceptions that extending periods of time pass without any work being carried out.

Similar analysis was undertaken regarding drivers of dissatisfaction relating to grounds maintenance in and around the council's housing stock. Over half of the responses (54.5%) related to the frequency of grass cutting and cleaning of the area. A quarter of responses referred to the general quality of work with the majority of these mentioning cutting and trimming of grass and bushes, and 13.5% of tenants said that waste was left behind and the area was left untidy.

Impact

Dissatisfaction with the maintenance and upkeep of communal spaces and estates will significantly impact upon the overall perception of the environment within which residents live. If there is a feeling that estates are not being appropriately managed it detrimentally impacts upon resident pride in the local area and reduces overall levels of civic responsibility.

The same applies to resident perceptions relating to anti-social behaviour in and around estates. Without coordinated and visible action, undertaken in partnership with residents and the local community to address what matters, the fear that estates are unsafe places will continue to grow and perpetuate.

Both of these factors cause harm to the health and wellbeing of households living in the area, who would feel that neither their homes nor neighbourhoods were liveable, safe or comfortable as expected within the social housing white paper.

A potential action that an affected household could take would be to seek to move to other accommodation elsewhere in Thurrock, however as previously evidenced there are a shortage of properties, critical demand for affordable and social housing, and a significant number of other households with diverse housing needs requiring support.

Recent action

The council commissioned an industry review of caretaking and estate services to be undertaken by in Summer 2021, with the final report and recommendations being received in November 2021.

The group that undertook the review have extensive experience in supporting organisations to achieve excellence through effective use of data, benchmarking performance and the processes that are driving that performance and have an extensive data set to enable such comparisons across the sector.

An overall service improvement plan has been developed incorporating the recommendations and actions from the review that seeks to improve estate standards and service delivery across the council's homes and neighbourhoods.

A new vision for estate services has also been set as a result. The council aims to provide proactive and flexible estate services, working together with communities to provide safe and clean neighbourhoods that meet residents' needs, delivering value for money and supporting health and wellbeing.

The proposals for new housing development schemes led by the council, in particular those with communal spaces, integrate the principles of "Secured by Design" to help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and improve resident feelings of safety. This also includes potential to deliver improvements to existing housing areas, such as plans for development at Broxburn Drive that will deliver public realm enhancements, enable higher quality new housing designs and allow better integration with the existing homes and residents.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will implement a new approach to estate inspections in order to protect resident safety in estates and communal areas</p>	<p>We will ensure that estates and communal areas remain safe and clear by delivering and embedding a new estate inspections quality and safety framework, supported by a new inspection regime</p> <p>We will rigorously inspect council-owned assets by accessing homes and communal areas more frequently to assess and remove health and safety risks including fire hazards and contacting hard-to-reach residents</p>	<p>Residents will experience improved physical safety and feeling of safety around the estates and neighbourhoods where the council's housing stock is located</p> <p>Residents will be protected from repetitive and severe hazards as a through the use of appropriate enforcement action available to the council</p>
<p>We will adopt a collaborative approach to improve safety on estates in order to address the issues that matter to local residents</p>	<p>We will work across housing, with our community partners and with residents to make our estates clean, attractive spaces where residents feel safe, using lighting, CCTV, and environmental improvements to do this</p> <p>We will establish a programme of resident and ward councillor estate walkabouts to improve the connection to and understanding of the local area and the issues that matter most to those who live there</p>	<p>Residents will benefit from targeted action and improvements in their neighbourhoods and estates that are informed by and aligned with their priorities, thereby strengthening connection with the area and improving perceptions of safety</p>
<p>We will invest in and embed technology in order to facilitate robust management of estate standards</p>	<p>We will improve monitoring of standards and compliance by implementing and enable new technological solutions</p> <p>We will seek to use this data to provide transparency to residents regarding estate maintenance and standards in their locality</p>	<p>Residents will have greater transparency regarding the provision of estate caretaking and maintenance services</p>

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will implement new approaches in order to tackle issues of nuisance parking on estates and improve the appearance of local areas</p>	<p>We will replace high-cost wooden knee rails and bollards that are easy to remove with green infrastructure such as hedging and shrub plants in order to deter nuisance parking and improve the quality of environment</p>	<p>Residents will benefit from more effective and attractive deterrents to nuisance parking, improving the overall quality of the area around their homes</p>

Chapter 7 – Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment

The COVID-19 pandemic led people to experience significant periods of social isolation and separation from their friends, family, and wider support networks. It also saw communities come together, with people supporting one another through immensely challenging and testing circumstances. The collective strength and resilience showed within communities

This chapter considers how relationships are built and strengthened between residents, the areas in which they live, the communities of which they are a part, and the organisations and groups that provide support and the council.

A significant ambition of this strategy is to support communities to build resilience and to broaden engagement with them. This strategy seeks to use the wider system and its networks to take an integrated approach in supporting communities, giving residents active and meaningful roles in matters that affect them in the context of housing and their estates and neighbourhoods.

Improve resident satisfaction and access to information

Context

The Charter for Social Housing Residents seeks to ensure that landlords remain transparent and accountable to their tenants at all times. The white paper sets out that every social housing resident should be able to expect to know how their landlord is performing.

As a mechanism to achieve this, the Regulator of Social Housing is seeking to introduce a suite of tenant satisfaction measures for all registered providers of social housing, including local authorities. Whilst the specific measures are still to be determined, the indicative measures provided for consultation were grouped under the following headings:

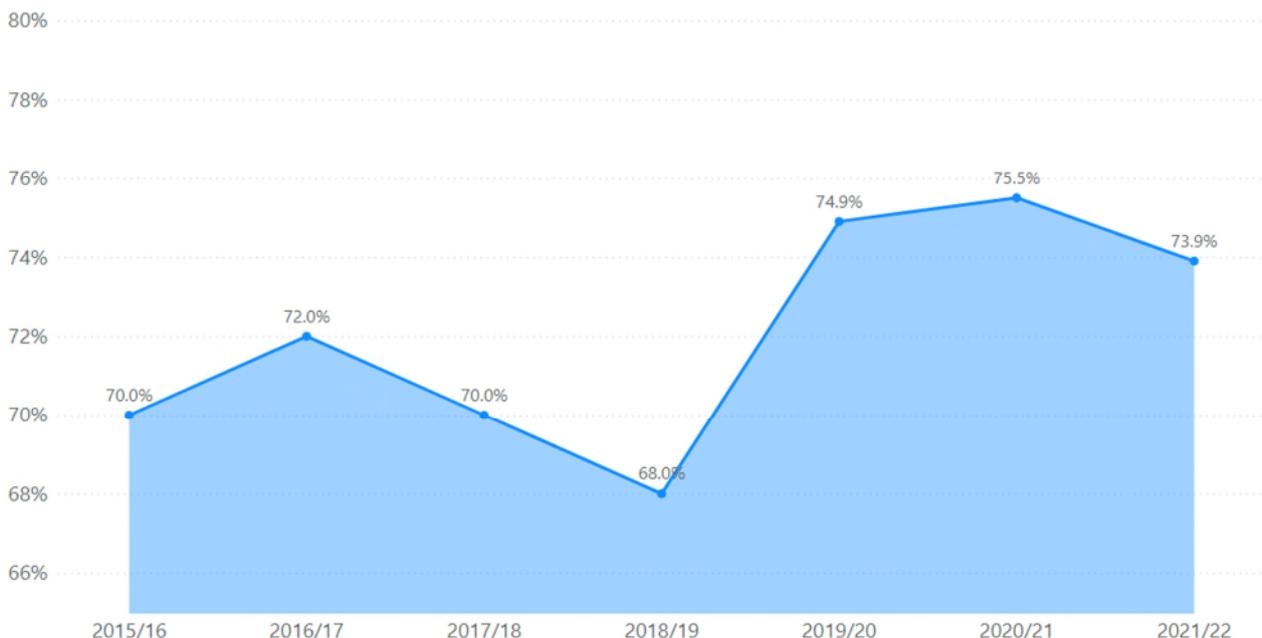
- Overall satisfaction
- Keeping properties in good repair
- Maintaining building safety
- Effective handling of complaints
- Respectful and helpful engagement
- Responsible neighbourhood management

In addition to greater transparency, these measures aim to inform the regulator about landlord compliance with the consumer standards under a more proactive consumer regulation regime as proposed in the social housing white paper.

The chart below indicates resident satisfaction levels with housing services in Thurrock between 2015/16 and 2021/22 (to date).

There has been a generally positive trend in recent years, however levels of resident satisfaction with housing services appear lower in 2021/22 to date.

% Tenant Satisfaction With The Overall Service Provided by Housing

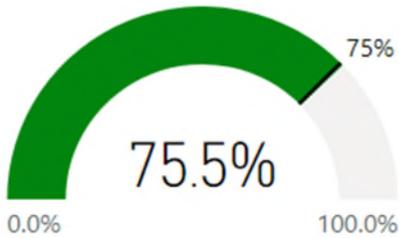


Chapter 7 – Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment

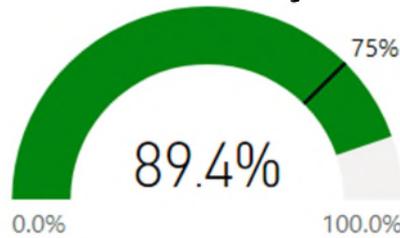
In 2020/21, the last full reporting year, a total of 1983 ratings were provided by residents. Of these, 1497 reported that they were fairly or very satisfied with the overall service provided by housing. 234 residents provided neutral responses, and 252 shared that they were fairly or very dissatisfied.

The visuals below show the resident satisfaction relating to several key measures for the 2020/21 reporting year, set against a target of 75%.

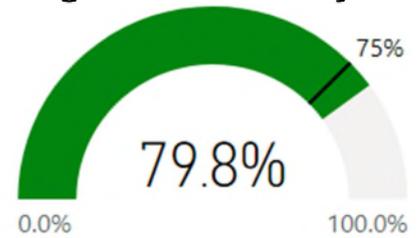
Overall service



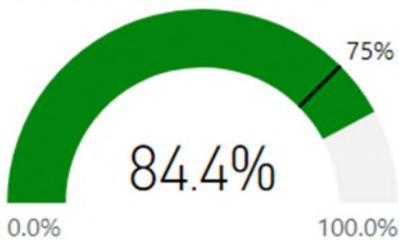
Rent value for money



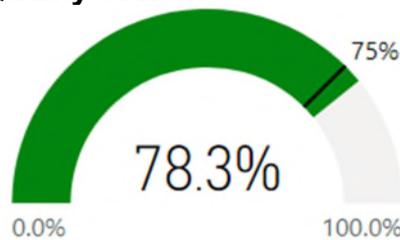
Charge value for money



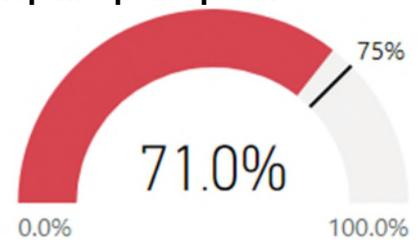
Home is safe and secure



Quality of home



Repairs perception

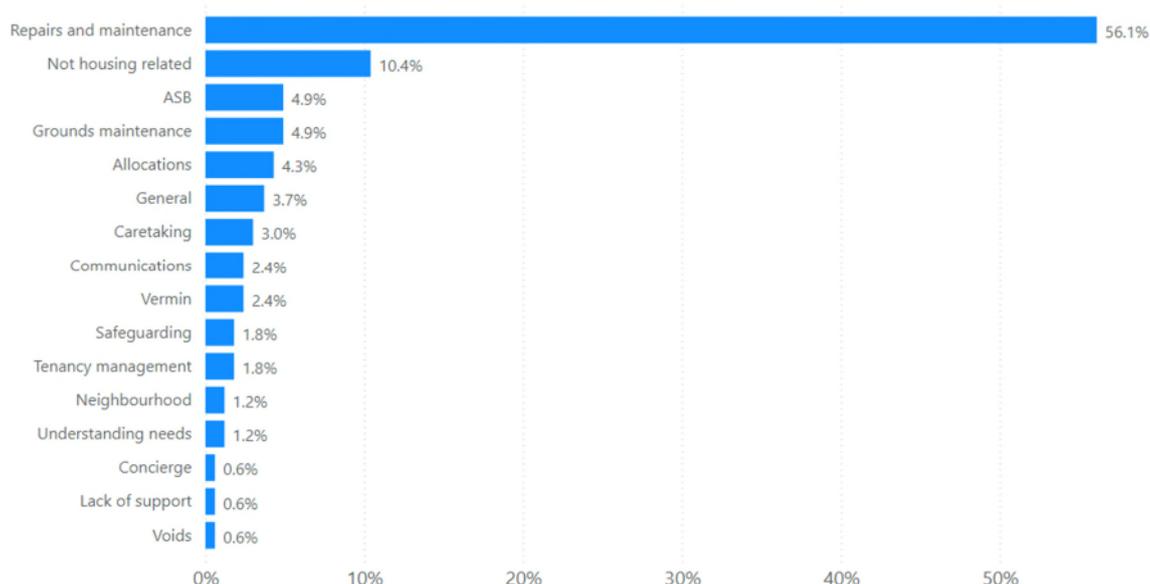


Whilst satisfaction was reported as being very high in some areas such as rent value for money and the perception that homes are safe and secure, the perception of the repairs service fell below the target set for the reporting year.

Analysis and categorisation of recent resident feedback indicates that presently, the repairs and maintenance service is the main factor for dissatisfaction with over half of all comments (56.1%) relating to it.

Chapter 7 – Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment

Dissatisfaction With The Overall Housing Service Reasons

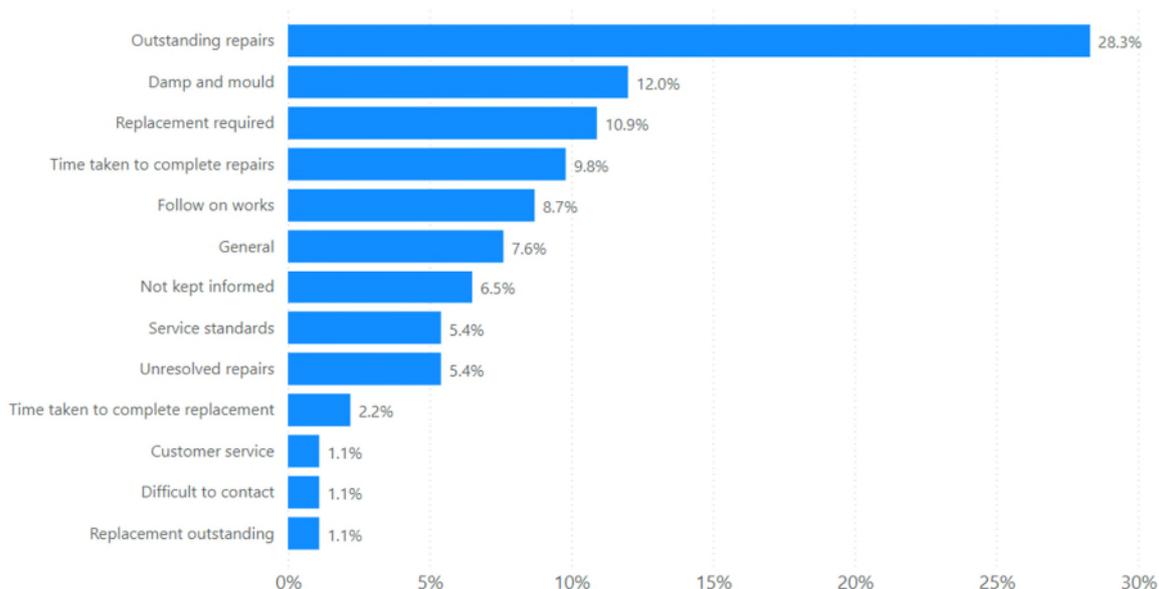


Within the repairs and maintenance category for dissatisfaction, outstanding repairs represented 28.3% of the feedback received.

Sheltered Housing tenants with a tenancy length of between 10 to 15 years, 15 to 20 years and under a year were 100% satisfied with the repairs service and the least satisfied have been a tenant between one and five years (70%).

Tenants within general needs properties that have lived in their property for 10 to 15 years were most satisfied (76.2%), and those who had held their tenancies for between 15 and 20 years are the least satisfied (53%).

Dissatisfaction With The Overall Housing Service Reasons (Repairs and Maintenance Only)



Listen, nothing and *done* all feature prominently in the word cloud visualisation. Analysis of underlying tenant responses show that these are related – among dissatisfied tenants there is the perception and experience that they do not see action taken when feedback is asked for or given about the things that matter to them.

Impact

It is important that the council tackles the drivers of resident dissatisfaction, as it can lead to wide ranging and harmful consequences for both residents and the council.

Dissatisfaction, as evidenced above, tends to arise from service failure of some form. Examples in the data include repairs remaining outstanding, tenants not being kept informed or updated, and not feeling listened to about what matters to them.

If dissatisfaction in these areas continue, there are avenues for formal expressions of concerns, including complaints and housing ombudsman investigations. Whilst these are legitimate routes of escalation available to residents when they feel something has gone wrong, they only offer the opportunity to react to a perceived or actual failure and tend to place parties in opposition, rather than proactively working in partnership to prevent the failure from occurring.

Tenant dissatisfaction, especially when it related to the landlord characteristics measures, can impact upon the trust that tenants have with housing services, and can reflect upon the wider council too. If tenants don't feel listened to, don't have access to the information they need and don't feel that their needs and priorities are understood, the damaged trust can be extremely difficult to repair, and will lead to broader challenges relating to community reception to possible changes introduced by the council.

Low levels of tenant satisfaction, in particular relating to feelings of being treated fairly by the council, can lead to tension within the community if there is an imbalance in equity and equality. This can be a contributory factor in other issues discussed in this strategy, such as antisocial behaviour, resident safety and estate standards.

Finally, tenant dissatisfaction can have an impact on staffing, leading to a greater turnover of officers. This, in turn, can lead to greater inconsistency in service, leading to further detrimental impacts on satisfaction and less time spent addressing what matters to residents.

Recent action

In June 2020 the housing service upgraded its Housing Online portal for tenants and housing register applicants. The system offers great potential for improving resident interaction with the council's housing services and the ability reports and concerns to be submitted directly, for example relating to issues of anti-social behaviour.

An improved Housing Options offer is also possible through the Housing Online portal which will reduce duplication for staff, offer a more joined-up experience for residents, and increase the quality of data and reporting which are available.

Between July 2020 and October 2020, a full postal tenant satisfaction survey was undertaken by the council's service provider, KWEST Research Ltd, which was sent to every tenant. The project used a multi-mode approach, comprising a postal census survey targeting all the Council's tenant households, accompanied by email invitations and an online version to broaden survey reach and accessibility.

The survey results provide confirmation that the homes and services provided by the Council are meeting the needs of most residents. This is demonstrated by high proportions of residents expressing satisfaction with many key service areas including rent value for money, quality of home, home is safe and secure, neighbourhoods as a place to live and the overall Housing service.

The housing service has successfully made use of technology to send specific and tailored text messages to its tenants for a range of reasons, such as to provide information and support for rent accounts, share information about resident engagement days and to alert tenants to issues that may be affecting their blocks, such as lift repairs and maintenance.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
We will implement digital solutions in order to improve resident access to information and housing services	<p>We will develop a digital strategy for housing and deliver against an action plan.</p> <p>We will improve digital access to housing services by enhancing the existing online tenant portal and developing new approaches for interaction, engagement and communication using technology</p>	Residents will find it easy to access housing services digitally and be able to interact with housing staff through digital devices, if that is their preference
We will demonstrate our commitment to listen to residents in order to better understanding their needs and priorities	<p>We will explore the reasons for dissatisfaction in relation to each individual satisfaction measure by deliver focus groups with tenants.</p> <p>We will close the contact loop with tenants by responding to the issues they raise, progress any actions required as a result and providing evidence of the outcome</p>	Residents will be able to share their issues with the council directly, ensuring that the action required to address the issue is understood, with trust in the council that their feedback will be acted upon
We will tackle the drivers of dissatisfaction in order to make positive changes and improvements to the things that matter most to residents	We will use continuous learning make significant progress to address the causes of dissatisfaction by acting upon the feedback we are given from tenants	Residents will experience greater levels of satisfaction with their home, local area and the service they receive from the council

Chapter 7 – Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment

What?	How?	Impact?
We will utilise technology and data analytics in order to better understand drivers of resident satisfaction and dissatisfaction	We will ensure that all feedback received is analysed and acted upon by developing a suite of integrated and connected dashboards for resident satisfaction, allowing for the relationship between multiple pieces of feedback to be understood and facilitating detailed assessment	Residents will find that the reasons for their dissatisfaction are better understood and will experience targeted responses to address the causes
We will proactively prepare to report against new national tenant satisfaction measures in order to make our performance as a landlord more visible to our tenants	We will implement a robust approach to recording, monitoring and reporting against the new tenant satisfaction measures that will be published by the Regulator of Social Housing by April 2023, to meet the first submission of data in Summer 2024	Residents will be better informed about the performance of the council as their landlord, and they will be empowered to hold the council to account through new regulation

Strengthen, integrate, and diversify community and resident engagement

Context

The *Charter for Social Housing Residents* sets an expectation for residents to have their voice heard by their landlord. Within the social housing white paper, the Government sets out that it will:

- expect the Regulator of Social Housing to require landlords to seek out best practice and consider how they can continually improve the way they engage with social housing tenants
- deliver a new opportunities and empowerment programme for social housing residents, to support more effective engagement between landlords and residents, and to give residents tools to influence their landlords and hold them to account
- review professional training and development to ensure residents receive a high standard of customer service.

The white paper also expects that the Regulator of Social Housing will require landlords to show how they have sought out and considered ways to improve tenant engagement.

Traditional forms of engagement, such as consultation and surveys, are not always effective and can even have an adverse impact upon wellbeing if people feel pressurised to take part or communities suffer from consultation fatigue.

Tpas, the tenant participation advisory service, recommends through its engagement standards that residents should have access to an appropriate range of engagement opportunities that reflects the resident profile. It also encourages landlords to respond to different needs in relation to equality and any additional support, evidenced in the delivery of services, engagement activities and communications to promote widespread engagement.

During the development of this strategy, residents stressed the importance of diversifying and expanding the opportunities and methods used for engagement. Recent years have seen significant growth of digital communication technology in homes, such as video calling and meetings, and the decline in face-to-face interaction due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Engagement can take many forms, but the crucial factor for the future is that it is tailored appropriately. There may be residents who want to proactively engage with policy design, for example, and others who may simply want to know that they are being considered in the way the council implements change and keeps residents them informed.

Broader community engagement also includes elected members. Mechanisms are already in place through Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Council to ensure that members are informed and engaged in matters relating to housing. This strategy will strengthen the relationship and information sharing between housing services and elected members relating to matters affecting the wards and communities they represent.

Voluntary sector organisations make a difference to the lives of communities, whether area-based or a community of interest. Many charities and voluntary organisations perform essential work that contribute to the fabric of our society. Often, they act as a vital referral resource for public services.

So much can be achieved through meaningful collaboration with voluntary sector organisations, rather than working in service-centric silos. The experience of working together to support

communities through COVID-19 demonstrated the level of trust that already exists between the public and voluntary sectors. Now more than ever, it is imperative that we support a sustainable third sector in Thurrock.

In Thurrock, the council recognises the value of a strong voluntary sector. In 2021, the council published its Collaborative Communities Framework to set out how it will improve the way it engages with communities, talks about shared concerns, and works better together.

The housing system is complex and ever-changing, and voluntary sector groups and organisations play a significant role in supporting and advocating for residents and communities.

Impact

The impact of traditional forms of consultation is that residents act as passive recipients of services provided by the council, providing feedback only when approached. Residents do not live their lives through our services, but through localities and neighbourhoods where many different factors combine to influence the quality of their lives. We need to move from an approach where we consult multiple times on services on strategies determined by us, to a single integrated approach based around place. Engagement needs to shift from being purely consultative to one of genuine co-design and co-production of new approaches to improve the quality of life of our residents.

Frontline staff have hundreds of interactions with residents every week, and staff groups like our tenancy management and sheltered housing officers have real insight into the needs of our neighbourhoods and communities, yet we never systematically collect this intelligence and use it to inform future strategy or delivery.

Locality based resident engagement provides the opportunity to develop offers of support and services that are designed specifically to meet the needs of that area. This makes the offered service more meaningful, prioritising what matters most to those in the local area and actively demonstrating evidence that resident feedback is being used constructively.

This approach would contribute towards a growing sense of community empowerment, with individuals becoming far more active citizens as they experienced a genuine sense of involvement and influence. It would also enable feedback to be delivered more consistently and quickly than is currently possible.

To further strengthen community empowerment, community reference and investment boards can be explored at estate or neighbourhood level, aligned with the approach set out in the *Case for Further Change*.

The principle of these boards is to devolve power from public sector organisations to communities for the funding of integrated services and deliver locally identified solutions, rather than centrally determined actions. To support this, the *Case for Further Change* proposes pooled funds at each locality level, so further exploration of this would be required to replicate this within a housing context.

Recent action

The housing services have strengthened its approach to resident engagement activity recently, working to share more information with tenants about subjects that matter to them.

In 2021, the council published a *Collaborative Communities Framework* for Thurrock to share the strengths and assets-based approach for how the council and its services intends to work with communities.

Co-produced through the *Stronger Together* partnership over three years, it sets out how we will work and enable our communities to co-design and influence decisions, address their own challenges and realise their own ambitions.

Case Study – Avon Green Garden

Avon Green comprises of 48 low rise flats. Prior to this project, the only space that residents could access were areas of hardstanding for washing lines, or small areas of grass at the front of the apartments. Spaces were uninspiring, had no function, and as a result were underused.

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, a local resident had become increasingly aware of how isolated she and many of the residents had become, especially older people and parents with young children. To tackle this social isolation and support community cohesion, they suggested the creation of a therapy garden, providing a space where residents could come together to garden, chat and enjoy the space.

The local community was engaged from start to finish to secure real ownership of the garden and to tailor support that would meet the needs of the residents who would use and manage the garden. Engagement started by asking residents about their preferences for the space and images were provided to represents elements that could be included within the community garden. 79% of all residents were in favour of the garden.

From this activity an indicative design was produced to show residents all the elements included and what the garden would look like.

To ensure a sense of ownership and care residents were empowered to have their say on how the garden will look and be used. The indicative was shared with the local community for feedback and comments, and residents were asked what they would like to grow and if they would like support to get the garden up and running. We had 40% response rate with residents requesting a mix of flowers, herbs, vegetables and salad crops, and sensory plants.

A percentage of residents signed up to a capacity building programme to develop skills to support the use and maintenance of the garden.

Some residents shared concerns that the garden may attract anti-social behaviour or be damaged, however positive discussions took place with the local community which reflected the benefits the garden would bring.

In order to get the garden up and running we worked in partnership, engaging and consulting with teams across service areas; the Capital Programme Delivery Team supported to secure funding for the project through its partnering contractor Wates. The Tenancy Management Team and Caretaking Services were consulted on location and what could be included, with the Health and Safety Team and Corporate Risk Insurance Team providing advice on installation of the garden and what would be needed to ensure safe use and maintenance of the garden for our residents.

The launch event at Avon Green Community Garden was held in November 2021.

Seven residents and their families have signed up to the gardening group, agreeing to maintain and take care of the garden.

A training programme delivered through the growing season will be held at the community food growing garden and will provide the skills and confidence needed to plan, plant, harvest and maintain the garden. Training will be structured around the growing season for 'real time' learning. Sessions will run every six weeks to ensure success through the first year of growing and that everyone knows what they are doing and when.

The publication of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 and the *Case for Further Change* provide an opportunity and starting point to build on the foundation of the Collaborative Communities Framework, strengthening the relationship and engagement between housing services, residents and the wider community, voluntary and faith sector in Thurrock.

Action Plan

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will embed an approach for co-design and improvement of services in order to meaningfully involve and empower residents and communities</p>	<p>We will adopt an approach across housing services that empowers residents to formally and informally co-design solutions and provision, influence and make decisions, raise issues, input in the tendering of new contract arrangements and address challenges relating to housing in Thurrock</p> <p>We will achieve the Tpas Resident Involvement Accreditation for Landlords by completing the accreditation process to demonstrate our commitment to resident involvement and ensure our approach is effective and offers the best value for money</p>	<p>Residents will benefit from meaningful involvement in the way that housing services are provided and improved, ensuring that local priorities are properly understood and acted upon</p> <p>Residents will not have to rely on traditional consultative forms of engagement to have their views heard, and can trust that feedback provided through everyday interactions for service improvement will be taken forward and implemented</p>

Chapter 7 – Strengthen Community Engagement and Empowerment

What?	How?	Impact?
<p>We will implement community reference and investment boards at neighbourhood level in order to strengthen community empowerment</p>	<p>We will develop proposals by following the approach for community reference and investment boards as set out in the <i>Case for Further Change</i> which will include exploring options for pooled locality funds</p> <p>We will work together with communities and the voluntary sector to deliver at a more local level, only centralising that which cannot be provided effectively in neighbourhoods and localities</p>	<p>Residents will benefit from devolved power from public sector organisations to communities for the funding of integrated services and delivery of locally identified solutions, rather than centrally determined actions</p>
<p>We will embed professional standards in housing services in order to ensure high service standards and consistency</p>	<p>We will ensure professionalism in Housing services by providing training opportunities for staff across the service that meet or exceed requirements for training standards as set out by the Regulator of Social Housing</p>	<p>Residents will be treated with respect by knowledgeable, skilled, ethical, and inclusive housing staff.</p>
<p>We will develop opportunities to educate about housing in order to develop skills for independent living</p>	<p>We will build stronger links and relationships with the schools and colleges within Thurrock and create platform to engage with children and young people regarding housing and skills for living independently</p>	<p>Residents will benefit from the sharing of skills, knowledge, and information relating to housing in adult life</p>

Chapter 8 – Monitoring and Review

The Housing Strategy must be kept under constant review. This is partly due to the increased likelihood that legislation will be introduced during the lifetime of the document, which may have a material effect on the aims, objectives and actions outlined in the Housing Strategy. In addition, as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing becomes more apparent in the months and years after the document's publication, new priorities or actions may emerge.

The monitoring and review of the Housing Strategy will be undertaken by a new Housing Strategy Deliver Board that will be established. This Board will be responsible for monitoring the progress of the action plan published alongside the strategy. The action plan will be kept as a live document and regularly updated to ensure progress and that key actions are delivered within defined timeframes.

The Housing Strategy Delivery Board will absorb the Homelessness Partnership Board, forming a single body with responsibilities for the progress of key strategic documents relating to housing.

As outlined above, it is anticipated that new actions will be added to the action plan during the lifetime of the strategy. Additions may be a reaction to changes in external factors (such as legislation) or proactively if an opportunity arises. These additions will be managed appropriately and ensure that the key themes continue to be reflected throughout the action plan.

An annual update will be provided to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure appropriate oversight of the action plan.