

# Housing Strategy

## 2015 - 2019



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# Foreword

This Strategy sets out how we will continue working in partnership to provide homes that meet the needs of people and communities and help create a Borough that is prosperous, clean, green and safe.

The Strategy recognises the fundamental role that housing plays in the health and wellbeing of people and local communities.

Making a positive difference to the Borough's residents is the responsibility of all agencies. We believe that by working together, and focusing on prevention, across a variety of settings, outcomes for people will be greatly improved. The Housing Strategy will act as the catalyst for change bringing together a mix of partners to deliver safe, high quality and sustainable services.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Pert', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Jeremy Pert

*Cabinet Member for Communities*

# Vision

To provide a range of high quality, safe and affordable housing to meet the  
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current and future needs of Stafford Borough's population and to ensure a  
.....  
healthy living environment for residents and local communities.  
.....

# Introduction

Stafford Borough Council's Corporate Plan and Prosperity Strategy explains how the organisation will lead a community and Borough which is prosperous, safe, healthy, clean and green. The provision of quality homes is an essential part of achieving these aims.

Access to a suitable, stable, safe and affordable home is fundamental to the quality of a person's life.

Housing provides personal space to sleep, rest, learn and grow. The links between poor quality housing and both physical and mental health are well documented.

A stable, secure home is a basic requirement and we want to ensure all households in the Borough have the opportunity to access to a home that meets their needs.

A home is much wider than a house; the neighbourhood in which people live is a major contributor to a person's health and wellbeing; with significant health inequalities between the least and most deprived areas of the Borough. Housing can be a driver for economic growth and employment and therefore this Strategy focuses not just on individual properties and people but also the wider environment that helps to make Stafford Borough a great place to live, learn, work, visit and invest in.

The Council has a recently adopted Plan for Stafford Borough<sup>1</sup>, setting out how market, affordable and specialist housing will be delivered over the next 15 years. This provides an essential tool to the successful delivery of the Housing Strategy's Vision.



# Purpose

This Strategy sets out the priorities of the Borough and why they are important. It was drafted following an evidence review of the state of the Borough, assessing achievements since the last Strategy and a major consultation event to capture the views of key partners.

There are 58,000 homes in Stafford Borough; since the last strategy was written in 2008:

- › over 16,000 of these homes have benefited from energy efficiency measures and advice;
- › 700 disabled facilities grants have helped people live independently in their own home;
- › 2,000 new homes have been built; and
- › nearly 1,700 people have been prevented from becoming homeless.

Many priorities are still important, we still need to build more homes, we have to continue our work preventing households becoming homeless and we want to keep

improving the condition of homes in Stafford. There are new priorities as well, we have listened to the views of residents and are actively bringing empty homes back into use. We are looking at wider issues that may impact on a person's ability to find or keep a home, working with partners we can direct people to the support services they need.

The Council and partners are actively working together to achieve shared goals. This strategy sets out the high level shared aspirations which all voluntary, public and private sector partner agencies will be working towards. The Strategy will be used to guide policy makers, commissioners and providers to deliver services that meet the needs of the community and align with the overall vision for the Borough.

The Strategy takes account of the National Housing Strategy 2011 and also links to key local documents that detail how specific housing objectives will be achieved.



# Priorities

## 1 Desirable homes and neighbourhoods

Stafford Borough is an attractive place to live, learn, work, visit and invest with a high quality natural environment, a good choice of quality housing, access to excellent educational facilities and a healthy economy with good transport and communication links. The Council and its partners will maintain and improve upon the Borough's already excellent foundations to ensure that all neighbourhoods are desirable, with a range of appropriate, affordable, quality homes within a prosperous, safe, healthy, clean and green environment that underpins the economic prosperity of the Borough.

We will:

### **a Deliver a range of housing types and tenures to meet local needs;**

- › Deliver 500 new homes including 210 affordable homes each year by working with developers and Registered Providers;
- › Develop Neighbourhood Plans that identify specific local need by working with local communities, in particular affordable housing in rural communities;
- › Develop specialist accommodation such as Flexi-Care working with the County Council and Registered Providers; and
- › Develop affordable housing from the commuted sums which arise from Section 106 agreements in partnership with Registered Providers.

### **b Ensure desirable homes and neighbourhoods:**

- › Develop master plans on Strategic Development Locations ensuring design and sustainability requirements are in line with the Plan for Stafford Borough.

### **c Encourage owners of empty homes to bring properties back into use:**

- › Identify empty homes and ensure appropriate levies are applied to long standing empty homes;
- › Identify and remove the barriers preventing long term empty homes being brought back into use;
- › Help owners put their homes up for sale or rent by developing a range of incentives; and
- › Ensure long term, problematic, empty homes are dealt with by using the full range of our enforcement

powers.

### **d Promote the Borough as a place to invest:**

- › Focus on major developments to further strengthen Stafford and Stone town centres and support developers in bringing forward identified sites;
- › Work with the Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure housing developments are aligned with Strategic Growth Points and provide the type of accommodation required;
- › Support private sector landlords to adapt to the changing housing market and take advantage of inward investment into the Borough;
- › Encourage landlords to identify and develop new market places (such as homeless clients); and
- › Positively promote the Borough as an area of good quality accommodation across all tenures.

### **e Ensure public space is clean, green and attractive:**

- › Ensure Master Plans and Design Guides are implemented and include suitable provision for open space, natural environments, transport links and local amenities;
- › Promote good quality neighbourhoods by using commuted sums and Section 106 agreements where possible;
- › Deal with premises that are a detriment to the environment by using our legal powers;
- › To provide a fast and effective response to environmental crime by ensuring our services are joined up with the Council's Street Scene department; and
- › Refresh the protocol for dealing with illegal encampments.

## 2 Healthy people and communities

Stafford Borough is an affluent area with low levels of deprivation, crime and unemployment, good levels of educational attainment, life expectancy and high levels of home ownership. Despite this overall picture there are pockets of deprivation, inequalities in health between the most and least deprived communities and individuals who need extra support in order to participate actively in the community.

We will:

**a Prevent homelessness and support homeless households into permanent accommodation:**

- › Work with partners to deliver the actions set out in the Council's Homelessness Strategy.

**b Ensure homes across all tenures provide a healthy living environment that enable residents to thrive:**

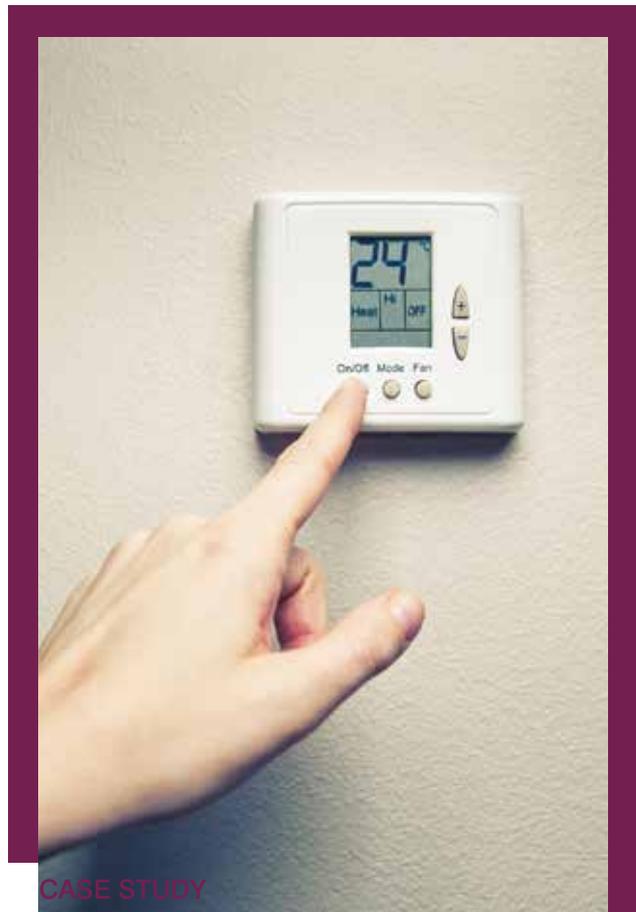
- › Raise standards in the private rented sector through working with landlords, the Landlords Forum and promoting of Accreditation and good practise;
- › Protect the health and wellbeing of tenants where landlords fail to engage using the full range of our legal powers;
- › Provide targeted assistance to protect the health, safety and welfare of vulnerable home owners; and
- › Improve conditions at the Glover Street Gypsy and Traveller site by refurbishment or relocation.

**c Tackle Fuel Poverty and Energy Inefficient Homes:**

- › Tackle cold homes by developing and promoting the work of Warmer Homes Stafford and securing funding where available;
- › Raise awareness of the impacts of cold homes and measures that can be taken to reduce them; and
- › Work with partners to ensure low income home owners have explored all opportunities to receive all the money they are due.

**d Support residents to find work, where needed, to avoid long term worklessness:**

- › Work with Job Centre Plus to support residents approaching the Housing Options Team into full employment where appropriate; and
- › Use local labour and provide training opportunities wherever possible and by ensuring that all contracts include these commitments.



**CASE STUDY**

Mrs A, a 68 year old lady contacted Stafford Borough Council for advice about the poor condition of her privately rented home.

While talking to her it became clear that she was also struggling with her fuel bills. She had attempted to get her landlord to carry out the repairs for a number of years but had failed.

A visit to her home revealed a number of hazards. The rotten and draughty windows were creating damp and mould. Roof tiles were loose and some had fallen off.

After she contacted the Council, the landlord agreed a programme of work and a timetable and soon the property was in a much better condition. The Council referred Mrs A to "Beat the Cold" who looked at her fuel bills and helped Mrs A deal with her energy provider.

Mrs A wrote to the Council to say she now felt safe in her home; she was warmer and no longer worried about her bills.

**e Ensure residents have access to advice and support services to improve their financial literacy:**

- › Work with Citizens Advice Bureau/ Debt Advice/ Housing Benefit and Registered Providers to ensure clients are supported to manage debts before crisis point is reached; and
- › Work with the Credit Union to encourage residents to start saving and providing access to affordable finance.

**f Ensure older and vulnerable households including carers have access to services:**

- › Support and develop signposting through the Partnership Hub, Lets Work Together and Advice Exchange services;
- › Develop and promote the work of the county-wide Home Improvement Agency; and
- › Work with the Stafford and Surrounds Health and Wellbeing Group and Clinical Commissioning Group to develop specific projects aimed at preventing ill-health and hospital admissions and supporting care at home (facilitating hospital admissions).

**g Support the reduction of crime in locality areas and support victims of crime:**

- › Support victims of Domestic Abuse through the Sanctuary scheme;
- › Work with Staffordshire Women's Aid to identify funding options to secure the long term future of the Women's Refuge;
- › Work with the police and fire service through the Partnership Hub to identify local areas of concern and develop joint solutions;
- › Monitor the housing market, in particular the growth of the private rented sector and houses-in-multiple-occupation; and
- › Use our enforcement powers to deal with premises that are open to access or a detriment to the amenity of the environment.



**CASE STUDY**

Mr P is a 65 year old private tenant living on his own.

The Housing Standards team were contacted by the fire service because they had concerns about the house after visiting to put in smoke detectors. Stafford Borough Council visited and found the house to be filthy, there was no heating and no functioning bathroom - the landlord had started work on replacing it but stopped many months previously.

Mr P had mobility problems and struggled to get up the stairs or out of his home.

The Council arranged for the property to be cleaned. The landlord was contacted about the repairs to the property and agreed to complete the works to the bathroom.

The landlord was provided with information so that he could apply for an energy efficiency grant to replace the old and defunct boiler with a modern energy efficient one. A grant is being arranged to install a stairlift so Mr P can safely access his bedroom and bathroom.

Through the work of the Council and partners and with support from the landlord, Mr P is warm and safe, he is no longer reliant on expensive portable electrical heaters and has a lower energy bill. Once the stairlift is fitted Mr P will be able to live in his home for years to come.

# Background

Stafford Borough has the largest geographical area in the County, covering 59,817 hectares with a population of approximately 57,000 households (CLG 2013). The Borough lies in the centre of the county, is home to the county town of Stafford, the canal town of Stone and several picturesque rural settlements.

There is a significant rural community with over a third of the population living in smaller settlements. In catering for the needs of rural communities, account has to be taken of their particular circumstances; this may include issues of accessibility of public transport, the availability of community facilities and services and the cost and time of getting to the main towns of the Borough.

Whilst, the population of Stafford Borough is predominantly White British, the number of minority groups living in the Borough is growing and their needs will be identified and addressed as part of this strategy. In 2015 Stafford will become home to returning Armed Forces Personnel and their families, totalling over 1,000 new residents, and although they will initially be housed within the Stafford base, it is anticipated a significant proportion will choose to remain in the Borough once their service has ended.

The overall resident population is not only growing but is also ageing, with an anticipated all age increase of 5.8% from 2011 to 2021 but an increase of 27.6% in over 65s and 40.2% in over 70s. The Borough already has the second oldest population within the County and the desire of many to continue living independently will place significant pressure on a range of services across the Borough, including housing and health in terms of adapting and maintaining existing homes and providing alternative housing solutions such as flexi-care facilities. The current shift to increase the level and range of health care services provided in the community relies on suitable housing to achieve this.

There are over 58,000 dwellings in the Borough (CLG 2012). Home ownership is higher than the national average although a significant change in the tenure of households can be seen with an increase in private renting of 92.2% between 2001 and 2011, (which mirrors the national rise in private renting). The tenure of residents is often a determining factor in the levels of demand for services and the type of interventions that are required. For instance, the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy in the private sector is the biggest single cause of homelessness in the Borough so growth in this sector will no doubt result in additional demand on the Housing Options service. Property condition is traditionally poorer in the private rented sector and the Council will continue to work proactively with landlords to raise standards, however, where owners fail to engage it will use the full range of its enforcement powers to protect tenants' health and wellbeing. Improving standards in the owner occupied sector is more focussed on supporting vulnerable households through advice and signposting with a limited range of financial assistance for key priorities such as disabled adaptations, energy efficiency and significant hazards in the home.

Reform of the welfare system presents significant challenges for some households who are having to adjust to reduced benefits and increased responsibility for managing their own finances. This may lead to greater demands on services that residents turn to for assistance. It also presents an added risk for both social and private landlords with the potential increase in rent arrears. The reforms have resulted in a marked shift in the type of affordable homes required by residents, with a greater demand for smaller properties.

# Health and Wellbeing

There is growing evidence to support the view that access to quality housing has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of people. Locally the Council and its partners have established the Stafford and Surrounds Health and Wellbeing Group to provide a local response to the emerging health and wellbeing agenda. This will see increasing levels of cooperation and integration with the Health Sector which will result in prevention being central to the challenge of improving health outcomes for everyone of all ages.

The Health and Social Care sectors are undergoing rapid transformation to ensure people are provided with better integrated care and support. The need for good quality housing forms a central part of this transformation. The partnerships formed to deliver this Strategy will work to support this transformation and form a vital part of these new ways of working.



# Delivery

In order to achieve our vision, we will work together with partners at all levels. Services must be delivered efficiently and in a way that targets resources at areas of greatest need. Changes to government funding will require local authorities to review their approach to service provision and is encouraging new methods of delivery. The Strategy will influence local commissioning and provider plans to ensure they work together for a common purpose.

The Strategy is underpinned by working action plans that will be overseen by the Councils' Health and Housing Services Group. These plans will be updated as required but the Housing Strategy 2015 - 2019 will remain as the framework for policy makers and practitioners in delivering services. Social, environmental and economic opportunities will always underpin the development and procurement of any services to ensure that value for money and the overall aims of the Borough are achieved.

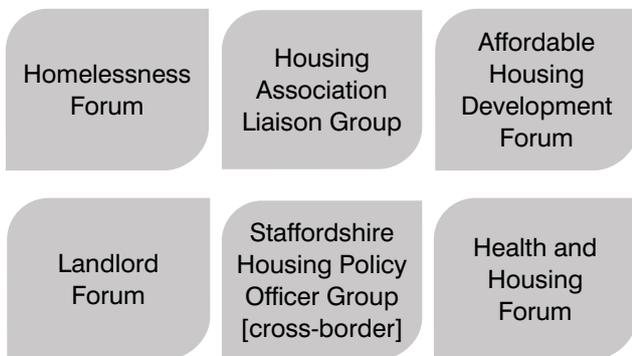
A wide range of partnerships operate in the Borough to support the delivery of the Housing Strategy.

Individual cases regularly provide challenges for services and require further liaison between organisations. The use of case conferences, where appropriate, enables co-ordinated response to complex cases ensuring improved outcomes both for individuals and the wider community. Appropriate Data Sharing Protocols will be established in order to allow for greater communication about cases where necessary to help the individual and wider community.

These strategies will be kept under review and amended as necessary with partners.

Up to date details of the range of key housing support services is maintained on the Council's website [www.staffordbc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/housing) and a wider range of services on Staffordshire County Council's Purple Pages website [www.purplepages.org.uk](http://www.purplepages.org.uk)

**Figure 1 Delivery Partnerships**



# Appendix

## APPENDIX 1

### Glossary

#### Affordable Housing

Social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

#### Social Rent

Usually owned by local authorities or registered providers with target rents determined through the national rent regime.

#### Affordable Rent

Homes let by local authorities or registered providers, at rents of no more than 80% of the local market rent, to households who are eligible for social rented housing.

#### Intermediate Affordable Housing

Homes for sale and rent provided at a cost above social rent, but below market levels subject to the criteria in the Affordable Housing definition above. These can include shared equity (shared ownership and equity loans), other low cost homes for sale and intermediate rent, but not affordable rented housing.

#### Homeless Prevention

Where a local authority takes positive action to provide housing assistance to someone who considers him or herself to be at risk of homelessness in the near future, and as a result the person is able to either remain in his or her existing accommodation or obtain alternative accommodation providing a solution for at least the next 6 months.

#### Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

A risk assessment tool used to assess 29 potential risks to the health and safety of occupants in homes. The assessment will show whether any serious (category 1) hazards and other less serious (category 2) hazards exist.

Details are available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/hhsrs-operating-guidance-housing-act-2004-guidance-about-inspections-and-assessment-of-hazards-given-under-section-9](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hhsrs-operating-guidance-housing-act-2004-guidance-about-inspections-and-assessment-of-hazards-given-under-section-9)

## APPENDIX 2

### Key Policy Documents

- 1 > Homelessness Strategy 2015
- 2 > Corporate Enforcement Policy  
[www.staffordbc.gov.uk/live/Documents/Policy%20and%20Plans/Environmental-Health---Enforcement-Policy.pdf](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/live/Documents/Policy%20and%20Plans/Environmental-Health---Enforcement-Policy.pdf)
- 3 > Tenancy Strategy  
[www.staffordbc.gov.uk/tenancy-strategy-2013](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/tenancy-strategy-2013)
- 4 > Allocation Policy  
[www.sarh.co.uk/getting-a-home/find-a-home/](http://www.sarh.co.uk/getting-a-home/find-a-home/)
- 5 > Plan for Stafford Borough  
[www.staffordbc.gov.uk/theplanforstaffordborough](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/theplanforstaffordborough)
- 6 > Health and Housing Policy
- 7 > Private Sector Assistance Policy
- 8 > Affordable Warmth Strategy  
[www.staffordbc.gov.uk/affordable-warmth-strategy](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/affordable-warmth-strategy)
- 9 > Empty Homes Strategy  
[www.staffordbc.gov.uk/empty-homes-strategy](http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/empty-homes-strategy)

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