

# ***Fit for the Future***

**A Council Housing Strategy for Norwich  
2020 - 2026**

## Foreword by Cllr Gail Harris, Cabinet Member for Social Housing

Having a good-quality home, in a community where people feel safe and connected, is important to each and every one of our citizens. I know that, for many people, finding and securing the right home is a real cause of concern.

The City Council has invested £94m over the past seven years in ensuring our Council homes are of a decent standard and have gone beyond the Government minimum standard by introducing the Norwich Standard. This means that not only do all of our homes reach the minimum required but every home has benefitted from a huge investment in planned works fitting new bathrooms, kitchens, doors and windows.

Our commitment to building excellent council homes was underlined this year when our Goldsmith Street development became the first social housing to be awarded the prestigious Stirling Prize and received national plaudits. Its impressive eco-credentials and sensitive, community design will serve as inspiration for us in properties we build in future.

Our housing management performance in our key areas like vacant property turnaround, repairs satisfaction, rent levels, arrears and collection are in and around the best in the UK. Year on year we have reduced spending on management, so that we can allocate more money to building and repairing and improving the supply and condition of really affordable housing.

But we have more to do – much more.

Our houses are getting older and so are our tenants and the demand for housing coupled with the increasing support needs of many of our tenants are growing year on year. Resources on the other hand are shrinking as the results of austerity reduce services and income of the council but also in the local economy and in residents' pockets. We can campaign to reverse this as we do but we also have to respond in the here and now. That is why we are changing the way we work to support people in need, and make sure our homes and the way we do things are fit for the future.

As cabinet member for social housing I am committed to continuing the proud tradition of this council building new homes and to increasing the number of new Council homes built by the council over the lifetime of this strategy and beyond.

We want to make a difference to peoples' lives by promoting independent living and to build sustainable communities, where people take responsibility for their own lives and those of their families. Norwich City Council will provide good quality, well maintained affordable homes to meet local housing needs within a safe, clean and well cared for neighbourhood'

I also want to make sure that our housing waiting list is fair, that people understand why we have to prioritise some people over others, and that we act quickly to help people in housing need.

How we support vulnerable people is important to me and is one of the Council's key priorities. We have invested heavily in joining up services to focus our resources particularly to older and vulnerable people through our sheltered housing service and the way we approach the basics of housing management.

Norwich City Council has worked tirelessly to mitigate the impact of the reduction in central government funding whilst also supporting every person and family affected by Welfare Reform and the roll-out of Universal Credit. We will continue this work to make sure that our City and its residents/citizens live well, have safe, clean great neighbourhoods and can benefit from a local economy those delivers for all.

Cllr Gail Harris

Deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing

## Introduction

A suitable, decent and affordable home is central to residents being able to enjoy a good quality of life. Norwich City Council has a proud tradition and history of building and providing good quality affordable housing for a significant number of the city's residents.

However, we are managing an increasingly scarce resource.

A growing population and the challenges of replacing houses lost through right to buy mean that the efficient, effective management of council houses, tenancies, waiting lists and lettings have become more and more critical. In addition to the core management task are contributions and interventions on wider agendas such as fuel poverty, digital inclusion and other social inequalities relating to health and well-being, poverty etc.

The housing management challenge extends to outside of the immediate property and concerns itself with the cleanliness and safety of estates and how well connected tenants are to communications and transport infrastructure. Revenue and capital spending will reflect all of these challenges in addition to spending on responsive, planned and programmed repairs and maintenance, plus any investment in new build properties.

The money that tenants pay in rent coupled with income from some assets owned by the Council goes into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). This is 'ring fenced' to pay for the repairs and management of council houses. Over the last few years considerable work has been done to develop a sustainable HRA business plan over 30 years that allowed the council to invest in the homes we already have to the Norwich Standard and to build new ones.

That plan was on track.

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 changed that situation with the Government imposed 1% rent reduction, the proposal that local authority stock holders would fund the costs of replacing right to buy sales in registered providers (the high value voids determination) and the continued risk of increased right to buy sales promoted by the Government.

The Government has since abandoned many of the key aspects of the Act that would have increased costs, accelerated right to buy sales and made council housing a more precarious tenure for many people and less affordable. However, despite the welcome removal of the HRA borrowing cap, recently offset by the subsequent 1% rise in public loans board interest rates which may dampen the council's ability to build new homes, the future sustainability of the HRA business plan relies on a longer term strategy which balances our ambition to build and improve homes for social rent, with our need to maintain existing stock.

The enforced 1% annual rent reduction from 2016 resulted in a loss of £200m over the life of the 30 year business plan but remedial action means the HRA remains relatively healthy particularly when modelled over a 60 year period.

The general downturn in the health of the UK economy, the difficulties in the housing sector in general as well as the continuing implications of welfare reform (including the roll out of Universal Credit) has had a negative impact on the ability for many tenants to pay their rent.

Reduced spending on other essential public services provided by other agencies (e.g. social services and policing) has also increased the challenges facing the council in supporting tenants to sustain their tenancies, and in supporting and accommodating more vulnerable people with complex needs.

Whilst much of the HRA income is spent on repairs, maintenance and the upgrade of council homes, an opportunity exists through the HRA business plan to further explore how HRA resources may support the council's developing and wider thinking about council housing.

This strategy sets out how the council will develop a long term view of Council housing in the city, covering supply, condition, allocation and management.

It is timely to consider whether our housing stock is fit for the future, to identify our short, medium and long term priorities and to organise ourselves in a way to deliver it.

This strategy sets out a way to do this. It will inform all of the decisions about Council housing including:

- where, when and what new council housing is built
- how much should and is spent on maintenance and management
- what informs the way homes are allocated and let
- supporting sustainable tenancies and intervening when needed
- Seeing council homes as a real asset not a property of last resort and as a fundamental element to the life and future shared prosperity of the city.

In this way the council's decisions can be based on the vision for the city, on housing need and peoples' aspirations and informed by financial realities and maintenance considerations rather than being informed by the current approach of being driven by the latter, and/or by unplanned, opportunistic developments.

The paper starts with some suggested high level statements about Council housing in the city and sets out a number of considerations that will need to be balanced in a comprehensive forward looking 30-60 year plan, and beyond, which is revised and revisited each year so that it reflects our long term thinking.

## Background and context

Norwich is the largest main urban area in Norfolk. The population of the Council's administrative area is around 140,000. The population has increased very year since 2001. Projections are that those trends will continue over the next 20 years.

The Council owns and manages 14,729 tenanted homes, 3059 leasehold homes and 3,333 garages. Employing around 140 staff the housing service is the council's largest single service. The service manages almost one quarter of all homes in Norwich, has a major impact on people's lives and the environment and contributes to many of the council's corporate objectives.

The homes are a mix of flats and houses, with 923 dedicated for 'sheltered housing':

Houses	6,158
Upper floor flats	3,688
Ground floor flats	3,114
Bungalows	869
Tower flats	407
Maisonettes / other	493

There is an overall annual budget of some £104million made up of around £67m allocated to day to day management and maintenance and operating costs as this includes financing items such as interest and revenue contributions to capital outlay. There is a capital budget in 2019/20 of £37m capital budget to build new home and improve the existing stock, repairs, maintenance and improvements.

As a registered provider the housing landlord service is regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). Registered providers must operate co-regulation principles with tenants. There are four consumer standards which apply to the service we provide to tenants:

- **Tenant involvement and empowerment** -  
Customer service, choice and complaints – Involvement and empowerment –  
Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants
- **Home** – Quality of accommodation – Repairs and maintenance
- **Tenancy** – Allocations and mutual exchanges – Tenancy management
- **Neighbourhood and community** – Neighbourhood management – Local area co-operation
- Anti-social behaviour

Our housing options service is regulated by legislation (parts VI and VII of the Housing Act).

These formal, legal and organisational standards form the framework in which the council provides and manages services to tenants.

## Service delivery arrangements

The teams that constitute the housing service are located at City Hall but essentially operation is mobile, visible and responsive to the needs of tenants and neighbourhoods through some patch based and some specialist working.

A duty service is provided at City Hall to deal with housing tenancy and home options enquiries at first point of contact and works consistently within the early help hub on more complex cases where other agencies can be engaged.

The functions are arranged through:

- **Housing Options** –including homelessness prevention, reduction and application, advice and support for rough sleepers, first stop housing advice and choice based lettings;
- **Tenancy management & housing Income** – responsible for day to day tenancy management of council homes, lettings, void management, estate management, caretaking services, rent setting and income collection.
- **Tenancy Sustainment** – providing housing support for sheltered tenants and securing additional support for independent living.
- **Housing Outcomes** – leaseholder management, right to buy, private sector leasing scheme and garage management.
- **NPS Norwich Ltd** – an arrangement to strategically and operationally manage and improve the condition of our housing stock and neighbourhoods through repairs, maintenance and investment.

This work is underpinned and informed by **an innovation and improvement team** that analyses data, undertakes research and develops tenant engagement to inform and evidence service delivery and improvement.

The council's **customer contact team** handles front facing contact by phone, email, letter, and mini-com or online via the council's website. Tenants and people needing housing advice or other services can access some services via the public access computer terminals available at City Hall.

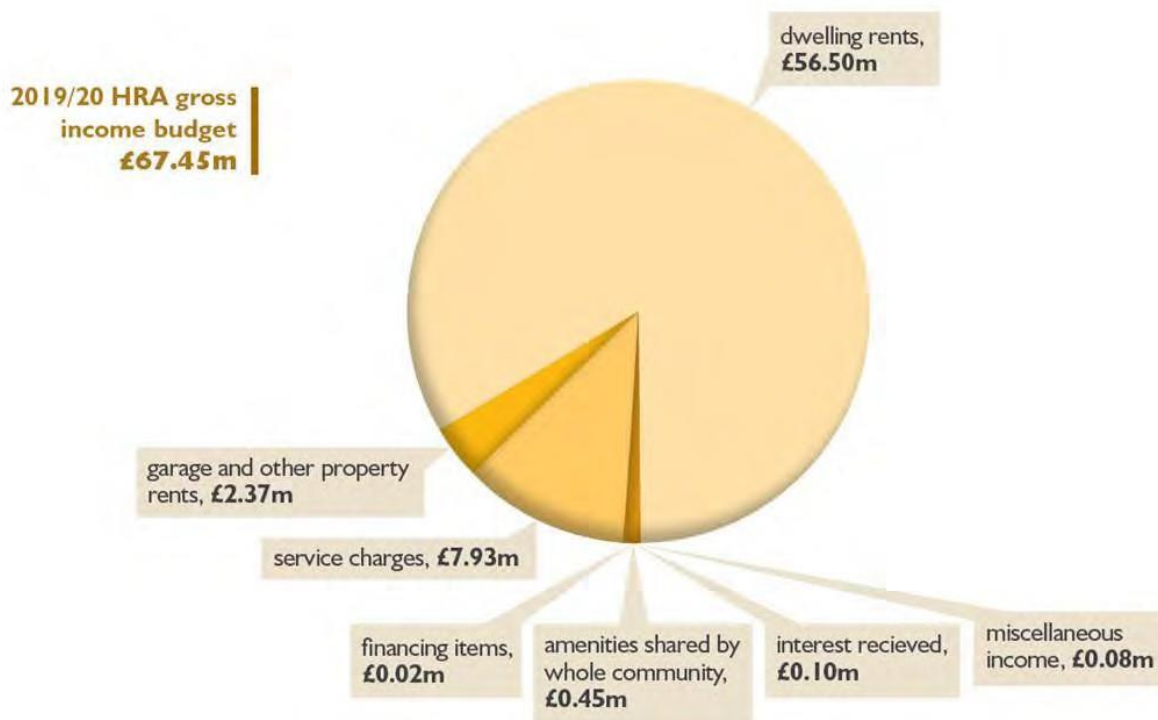
**Citywide services** are responsible for the grounds maintenance, cleansing and refuse collection contracts for the council housing stock and the **area management teams** work in partnership with housing on broader community issues and are responsible for delivering a first stop, tenure neutral, approach to anti social behaviour.

The **ABATE team**, dealing with the most complex of ASB cases where legal action is required.

The **specialist support team** located in the neighbourhoods directorate provide bespoke targeted interventions in complex cases where tenants are at serious risk of losing their tenancy or of the tenancy failing.

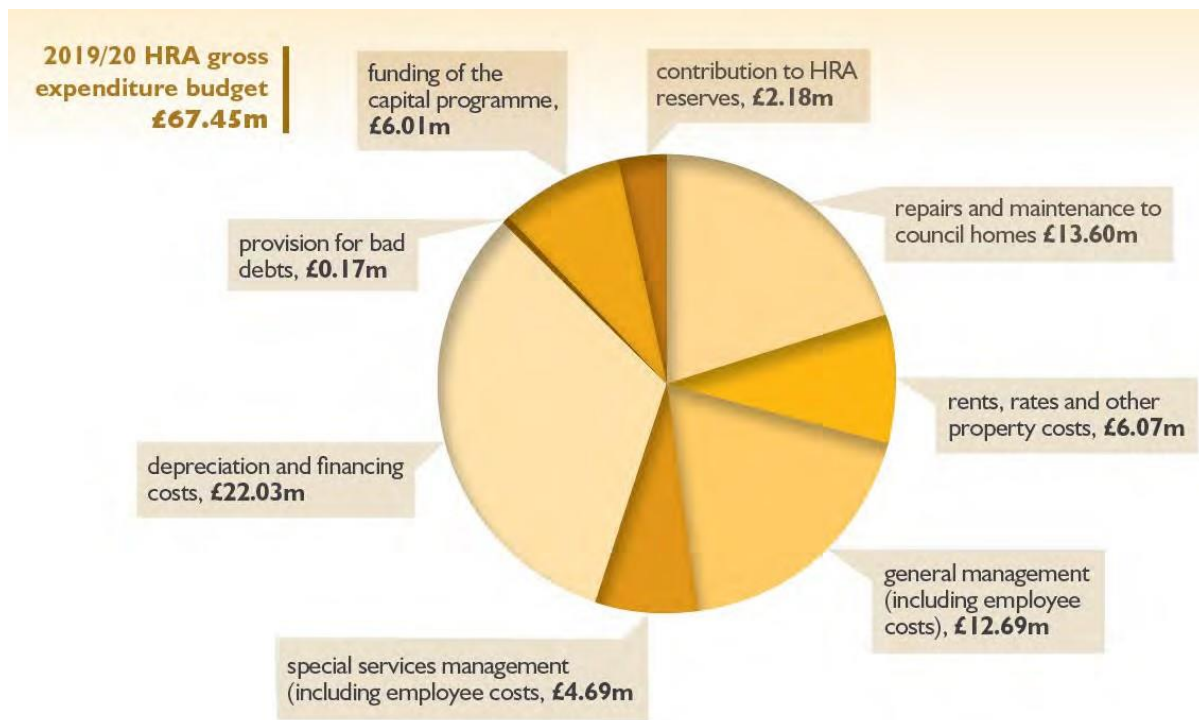
Working collaboratively is critical to the success of the housing service. Our key partners include Norfolk County Council, children's services, health and social care commissioning. Our ABATE team work closely with the Police as part of the Norwich Operational Partnership Team (OPT) in dealing with antisocial behaviour (ASB) and the increasingly problematic issues arising from county lines which impacts on the most vulnerable, the voluntary sector to provide support and move on accommodation through our homeless protocol and the Norfolk housing alliance representing social housing providers across Norfolk.

## Income and costs Income budget 2019-20





# Expenditure budget 2019-2020



## How are we doing?

The housing service is underpinned by a range of key performance indicators that show how the service contributes to wider corporate priorities and how well we perform against our targets in comparison to past with our ‘family’ of benchmark housing providers (i.e. those with similar size and characteristics).

Performance improvement drives our activity and tells us not only what we do and how well we do it and also what tenants think of us and the services they pay for through their rent. Some headlines include

Housing Service performance  
from April to June 2019



Norwich City Council subscribes to HouseMark, a performance management and benchmarking service, jointly owned by the National Housing Federation and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

For 2018-19 we submitted performance results to HouseMark and compared our performance to 110 other registered housing providers with between 10,000 and 20,000 properties.

Of the headline measures above, we are top performing compared to our peer group for satisfaction with our repair service, repairs completed at first visit, appointments kept and average days to relet.

## Fit for the future – Our vision, ambition, mission and goals

Over the last year, the public and representatives from businesses, organisations and community groups were asked what they value in Norwich and what they see as the future challenges – what sort of city they want to see in 2040.

Focus groups, public and stakeholder interviews and two conferences have all fed into the story of Norwich as it is now, and as it should be in the future.

**THE THEMES**

**A CREATIVE CITY**  
Norwich is a place where culture and creativity play an important part in how the city feels about itself and others perceive it. In 2040, Norwich will be world-renowned for its creativity – a leader in innovation, culture, education and invention.

**A LIVEABLE CITY**  
The city takes pride in being a place with a great local environment that people value. We are committed to shifting to clean energy by 2040 (carbon-neutral by 2050). We will support and promote sustainable living – where today's citizens meet the needs of the present without compromising future generations.

**A FAIR CITY**  
Norwich is a place where many already enjoy a great quality of life. By 2040, the health, wellbeing and life chances of all our citizens will be improved. We will remove barriers to achievement and a high standard of living will be enjoyed by everyone.

**A CONNECTED CITY**  
At the heart of any good city is how well it connects with both its citizens and the world at large. In 2040, Norwich will have a modern transport system, be at the forefront of digital connectivity and create opportunities for all residents to link with each other.

**A DYNAMIC CITY**  
Today Norwich has two successful universities and thriving life sciences, creative, tech, leisure and retail sectors. In 2040, Norwich will be a place where entrepreneurs, social enterprises, national and global companies choose to provide good jobs, prosperity and success.

Norwich City Council's '2040' Vision sets out the themes and ambitions for the city and for its citizens to continue to drive Norwich forward whilst ensuring that the benefits of success are felt by all residents.

As a council our **corporate vision** is to make Norwich a fine city for all and to put people and the city first.

### We will:

- Work creatively, flexibly and in partnership with others to create a city of which we can all be proud.

- Provide good services to our residents, visitors and businesses, whilst enabling people to help themselves and ensuring that those who need extra help can access it.
- Be financially self-sufficient, to ensure the sustainability of our services.

This means that we:

- Understand our city and our customers, recognising the interconnected nature of the objectives we are seeking to achieve.
- Take decisions based on a full understanding of the evidence and risks.
- Build relationships proactively and work collaboratively internally and externally and leverage resource where possible to deliver the best outcomes.
- Are agile and adaptable, to enable us to adjust our resources to deliver our priorities.
- Adopt commercial approaches where appropriate.
- Value and trust our staff and our partners and respect PACE values.

In delivering its ambition, the council will focus on three main priorities:

- Great Neighbourhoods, housing and environment
- Inclusive economy – Making sure that everyone who lives here can contribute to and benefit from, the city’s success.
- People live well

**Our council housing ambition is to**

**“provide good quality, well maintained affordable homes to meet local housing needs within a safe, clean and well cared for neighbourhood’**

**We want to make a difference to peoples’ lives by promoting independent living and to build sustainable communities, where people take responsibility for their own lives and those of their families”**

In order to achieve our vision and provide focus for our mission we have identified four primary goals. These are underpinned by four secondary goals that will ensure that our work in delivering the primary goals creates sustainable communities, provides value for money, enables equality of access to all and helps to combat climate change.

Our **primary goals** are:

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- **Meeting Housing need - Delivering new homes.**
- **Maintaining and improving condition of existing housing**
- **Improving the use and management of our existing housing stock**
- **Improving our neighbourhoods.**

The way in which we will deliver our goals is outlined in the following sections and more detail about our proposed actions will be detailed in an corporate plans, an annual action plan and individual service plans.

## Goal 1 - Meeting Housing need - Delivering new homes.

During 2017-18, 1,019 people asked the council for help as they were at threat of being homeless. There are also 4,024 people on our waiting list, of which

- 1,788 are awaiting a transfer to either a bigger property or another location
- 2,096 are awaiting a new home.
- 316 people on the waiting list are emergency or gold band as they have a high priority need
- 2,411 have been assessed as having a low need or no priority.
- 46% of people on the waiting list have been waiting over a year.

The Strategic Housing Market Area Assessment (SHMAA) carried out in 2017 looked at all housing need from 2015 through to 2036 and concluded that to meet the growing population and changing of households, Norwich needs 5828 new homes (apportioned as 84% rated social and affordable and 16% intermediate tenures) - an additional 278 'affordable' homes per annum.

Figure 96: Size and Tenure Mix for Objectively Assessed Need Dwellings 2012-2036 by Local Authority (Source: ORS Housing Model. Note: figures may not sum due to rounding)

Dwellings		Breckland	Broadland	North Norfolk	Norwich	South Norfolk
<b>MARKET HOUSING</b>						
Flat	1 bedroom	-	200	200	1,400	300
	2 bedrooms	-100	100	300	1,800	300
House	2 bedrooms	200	1,700	900	1,700	1,700
	3 bedrooms	6,900	6,600	5,200	6,600	9,100
	4 bedrooms	1,600	1,900	1,000	1,100	3,400
	5+ bedrooms	600	400	300	300	1,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>9,200</b>	<b>10,900</b>	<b>7,900</b>	<b>12,900</b>	<b>15,800</b>
<b>AFFORDABLE HOUSING</b>						
Flat	1 bedrooms	400	200	200	1,600	500
	2 bedroom	300	-	100	1,700	200
House	2 bedrooms	1,700	1,100	900	900	1,200
	3 bedrooms	2,500	800	900	2,500	1,300
	4+ bedrooms	200	100	100	300	200
<b>Total Affordable Housing</b>		<b>5,100</b>	<b>2,200</b>	<b>2,200</b>	<b>7,000</b>	<b>3,400</b>
<b>Total Housing</b>		<b>14,300</b>	<b>13,100</b>	<b>10,100</b>	<b>19,900</b>	<b>19,200</b>

What we don't know is if and how our existing stock will cater for changing family make up and individual housing needs in the same plan period. Changes to welfare provision and wider societal changes coupled with changes in peoples' hopes and expectations can all affect how people see their future lives and where and how they live.

As the strategic housing authority and a main provider of social housing the challenge for the Council is to ensure that our future housing not only meets the needs of our present and future citizens and families at any given point in time but also that they can be 'homes for life' or at least that 'homes for life' are available.

We also need to consider that, as things stand, about 140 of our existing homes are sold each year as tenants exercise their right to buy. Over the last five years 789 homes have been lost from the social rented stock.

We are confident that in the short to medium term we can identify and commission the building of additional housing to meet some of this existing and foreseeable need and replace some homes lost through right to buy.

The Council has worked in partnership with other registered providers, developers, and its own wholly owned housing company Norwich Regeneration limited (NRL) to build, buy and enable homes for social affordable rent with 93 homes in Goldsmith Street, 10 in Hansard Close and currently 49 at Rayne Park in the Three Score development in Bowthorpe.

Up to 300 additional homes are planned for major developments in small and medium sized sites including at Mile Cross. More are planned as part of developments in the north of the city and others at smaller sites throughout the city.

***Significant as this may be it will not be enough to meet rising housing need identified earlier.***

To address the challenges we will

- Commission a study of existing stock condition, type and projected housing need into the future with a particular emphasis on family housing.
- Develop more cost effective and faster ways to deliver more homes for those in need are required and we will need to commission larger scale developments to complement the existing smaller scale and opportunistic development approach to create a critical mass of supply which can make as step change in our efforts to meet housing need.
- Develop a land strategy with our registered provider partners and NRL to include land which may be 'outside but serving' the city.
- We will set out a capital ambition for the next 25 years which delivers significant new 'affordable homes over the next 6 years - the overwhelming majority will be council homes at

social rent levels. To ensure we have sufficient professional and technical capacity to build at sufficient speed and with confidence about price and house type and embrace new build techniques such as modular build based on a Norwich Standard' designs guaranteeing space, design and massing of sites that are fit for the future.

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## Goal 2 • Maintaining and improving condition of existing housing

Each year the Housing Revenue account spends around £8 million on responsive repairs to its properties. In 2018/19, 37,558 repairs were undertaken to 9,175 properties. These works are organised through NPS Norwich (a joint venture between the city council and NPS Group) and delivered by Norwich Norse Building with overall good performance. It will be important that this performance is maintained throughout the changes required to end the joint venture arrangements and exert more control over this work and create improved value.

Our stock condition assessment and historic spend show that the council's maintenance costs are high mainly because of the age profile of the properties with many at the end of the original build life but also because this stock costs more to maintain because the properties were built with traditional materials. A lot of investment was and continues to be made in upgrading and maintaining poor drainage systems across the City because of the ageing sewerage systems in many of our estates.

- Whilst energy efficiency ratings are on average high in council homes when compared to the private rented sector, some are low due to a third of the stock being built pre-1945<sup>1</sup>. Certain stock types are more expensive to maintain although a number of initiatives have been carried out to improve the SAP ratings of properties with 80% meeting level C by 2021 and 100% by 2025.

Stock condition surveys are carried out every five years on a rolling programme and form the basis of a revised 60 year investment plan and capital programme. Previous capital programme for housing has been driven almost exclusively by the maintenance requirements of the stock rather than the strategic requirements and council housing priorities of the Council. Recent work on the 2018/19 programme and the emerging capital ambition attempts to mirror the four key 'goals' of the housing service HRA strategy.

Currently our work on **Maintaining and improving condition of existing housing** is based on all homes meeting the Norwich Standard. This developed from the Decent Homes Standard driven by the UK Government's Housing Green Paper – 'Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All'. The standard was first published in England in April 2002. The Decent Homes Standard incorporates four main criteria:

- the statutory minimum fitness standard for housing
- repair
- modern facilities and services
- thermal comfort

Any property that does not meet all four criteria is deemed to have failed the standard.

The Council has adopted the Norwich standard which requires that over and above the decent homes standard Norwich Council homes will have

- Kitchens no more than 20 years old.
- Bathrooms no older than 30 years
- Heating boilers no older than 15 years.
- 100% with composite doors and electrical rewiring.

## Future challenges

Our performance indicator reports that 98% of our homes meet the Norwich Standard where tenants have agreed to the work taking place.

Some tenants do not want the upgrades for a variety of reasons such as not wanting the upheaval, wanting to keep the existing facilities or they have already upgraded their home for themselves. This means that there are 3,629 elements that do not meet the Norwich Standard across 2,699 homes. These completions are programmed to be completed to ensure all properties are meeting the Norwich standard and continue to do so and where tenancies change the opportunity is taken to undertake this work.

With climate change and an increasing concern about fuel poverty affecting households in Norwich, the Council's capital programme will need to take into account the fuel efficiency of our properties. The Government's recent green paper a new deal for social housing (2018), in addition to reviewing the decent homes standard proposes to make it a requirement that all social housing needs to have an efficiency rating of C or above. Although the stock is generally in good order it will be necessary to align our investment programmes with this requirement.

More generally, our future capital and revenue spending programme will need to be mindful of the wider aspects of the older and poorly performing stock to inform a strategy to dispose or upgrade to ensure all stock is fit for the future. Options may be to remodel existing dwellings, dispose of poor performing dwellings and/or redevelop some properties to extend lifespan or improve the suitability and/or condition of the housing supply.

Following the Grenfell tragedy safety issues, particularly in relation to tower blocks, are also taking on increased prominence. The Hackett review (2018) placed increased expectations and responsibilities on safety in high rises. Indeed, the Council has completed fire safety works totalling in excess of £2million to ensure any fire is prevented but in the unlikely event is contained within the compartments of the dwelling as designed. Whilst the focus has been on high rise blocks, there are also implications for management of the low and medium rise blocks.

In addition, a recent review of costs within the HRA business plan highlighted some very significant costs emerging for the repair and maintenance of flats and the eight tower blocks. Built in the sixties with a 60-year lifespan this is leading to significant capital costs being projected over the next 10 years in order to extend their lifespan and to increase the fuel efficiency.

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Current work to renew the lateral and rising power supplies to the two tower blocks will cost in the region of £3million and as much as £60million over the next ten years may be required to retain the 8 high rise blocks to an acceptable standard. The 30 year investment plan outlines some options which will be pursued along with engaging more effectively with current and potential/future leaseholders (pre-RTB) to inform potential and existing leaseholders of the future costs associated with leasing a freehold held by the council.

In addition to these works a review of our existing sheltered housing is in progress which proposes some key investment to ensure housing for supported 'independent living' is suitable and appropriate to meet the needs of older more vulnerable people into the future. However, it is also recognised that there are some/many tenants in the general needs stock who require support to live independently and to help them retain their tenancies.

### **Future actions to meet these challenges.**

We will continue to develop our capital programme around our 4 key goals but in relation to stock condition and suitability we will:

- Determine future investment by developing a maintenance and improvement strategy based on the stock condition and a full understanding of the full property and management costs and utility of our stock in line with the Councils strategic objectives and future housing need.
- Commission a review of our tower blocks to include an options appraisal of all blocks to ensure we make the best use of our future financial resources reduce our liabilities and repair obligations.
- Develop a strategy to drive down fuel costs for our tenants and increase fuel efficiency of our stock.
- Better understand our sheltered housing provision.
- Develop a tenure neutral approach to enabling independent living bringing together Disabled facilities grants and council adaptations teams and finance with existing support services.
- Increase the control, influence and value for money of our contractors and providers seeking to increase the amount spent in the local economy.

## GOAL 3 Improving the use and management of our existing homes

This section deals with how we allocate our properties and manage the tenancies.

Homelessness and its prevention are addressed in the Council's homelessness strategy.

Norwich has some aspects of housing that are distinctive such as the relative popularity of living in tower blocks for existing tenants but less enthusiasm among applicants. Only a third of our homes are families with children. Notably, of the 14,729 properties that the council own and manage over half are flats.

An increasing number of our new and existing tenants and applicants have needs other than requiring a home and some have very challenging needs ranging from physical disability to mental health issues. Poverty, deprivation and chronic illness also provide a backdrop to the work we do which means that the Council is not and cannot be 'just a landlord'. However this comes at a cost following the reductions to supporting people funding.

More specifically, as outlined earlier applicants in need of housing are placed into one of the following five bands according to the level of housing need:

- Emergency Band
- Gold Band
- Silver Band
- Bronze Band
- Low Need Band

The criterion for each band is shown below:

### Emergency Band:

- Applicants threatened with serious and immediate violence
- Applicants accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need
- Applicants with very urgent and serious medical needs
- Applicants where a emergency prohibition order has been served on their current property
- Applicants requiring urgent hospital discharge where their current property is totally unsuitable for their needs
- Applicants with a combination of high needs
- Other very extreme circumstances

### Gold Band:

- Applicants threatened with Homelessness, within 12 weeks, through no fault of their own, who have been assessed by a housing adviser as likely to be in priority need.
- Applicants with high medical needs
- Applicants with high welfare needs

- Applicants where a prohibition order or demolition order has been served on their current property
- Overcrowding - applicants lack two or more bedrooms
- Existing Home Option tenants under occupying by two or more bedrooms and prepared to move in to significantly smaller accommodation, or occupying an adapted property that they no longer require.
- Applicants in supported housing/hostels who participate in the hostel move on agreement and are assessed as needing to move on.
- Significant evidence of harassment or violence where a change of accommodation could be reasonably expected to alleviate the problem.
- Applicants with a combination of medium needs

### **Silver Band:**

- Applicants with significant medical needs as determined by the particular council
- Applicants with medium welfare needs as determined by the particular council
- Applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness who are assessed by the particular scheme council as not to be in priority need
- A hazard awareness notice has been served by the Private Sector Housing Team, of the particular scheme council, on the applicant's current property. In relation to a category 1 or 2 hazard at the applicant's home where the remedies needed to reduce the hazard will require the property to be vacated for a significant period of time; or the cost of the remedies are beyond the means of the applicant; or the remedies will make the property unsuitable for occupation by the applicant
- Existing Home Option tenants who are under occupying by 1 bedroom and are willing to move to smaller accommodation.
- Applicants lacking one bedroom.
- Applicants with child(ren) aged 10 or under, living in a maisonette or a flat without a garden on the same level as the property.

### **Bronze Band:**

- Applicants with one of the assessed needs as detailed in emergency, gold or silver band but who do not have a local connection to the particular scheme council area
- Applicants who, following a homelessness application, have been deemed by the particular scheme council to be in priority need but are intentionally homeless.
- Applicants with one of the assessed needs as detailed in emergency, gold or silver band but who have been assessed for reduced preference.

### **Low Need Band:**

- All other applicants

The applicants who are assessed in emergency, gold and silver bands can be quickly accommodated. Those assessed as being in low need or bronze banded can wait for many years and still not be accommodated. Sometimes this is due to applicants wanting a property in a

specific location and one of the consequences of the current allocations policy is that time spent on the waiting list does not increase the chance of obtaining accommodation.

- Transfers between council properties are mostly due to growing families upsizing to larger accommodation.
- New build properties while meeting housing need initially are most at risk of being subject to right to buy.
- Data shows a low prevalence of families with children being accommodated in council stock. The private rented sector has grown in terms of accommodating families who cannot afford to buy their own homes and who do not qualify or cannot access Council housing. It does raise the question of whether Council housing is currently meeting broader housing need rather than acute housing need by not being able to accommodate or providing homes for enough families.
- Out of 4018 Home Options applicants, 1589 are from families with children.
- Out of a council stock of 14,729 properties, 11,196 are two bed or greater and could accommodate a family with children. Of these 11,527 properties, 4,867 are flats.

## Our Future Challenges

Overall demand for housing services or at least support required to sustain and retain a tenancy is increasing. Conversely, there is a drive to increase efficiency in providing that service as increasing levels of funding are needed to pay for repairs, the maintenance of existing stock and importantly to build new homes.

Overall housing need was highlighted earlier in this document showing that as families grow and develop the demand on housing increases. At the same time there are many families which have grown up in council properties and as children leave home are now as defined by housing legislation would be seen to be under occupying their homes.

There are some other observations which will need to be considered to re-define our allocations policies more in keeping with the need to address and meet housing need into the future.

- Families don't 'aspire' to live in flats preferring to express their housing needs as needing a house with a garden and consequently demand for flats from families is low. Demand for houses is therefore extremely high. The council reinforces the view that flats are not suitable accommodation for families through its Home Options policy, awarding gold band for families in 2nd floor or above with no lift and silver band for applicants in flats with no garden on the same level.
- Although popular with *existing* tenants tower blocks are increasingly more difficult to let.
- Time spent on the waiting list does not increase the chance of obtaining accommodation.

*Fit for the future*



- Many of our tenants are becoming increasingly reliant on advice and support to sustain a tenancy because of financial challenges, mental health needs or sometimes both at a time when other statutory and voluntary provision is being withdrawn.
- Sheltered housing tenants pay an additional charge for some limited support now paid for by the council based on individual support plans but many are not in any greater need than many tenants living in general needs stock.
- A policy based primarily on absolute need will continue to create communities with widening inequalities in health, wealth and opportunities rather than more mixed self-sustaining communities.

These issues highlight some key questions.

- What do we want our allocations policy to achieve?
- How can we tackle stigma, encourage independence and 'pride' at the beginning and through the life of the tenancy?
- Although sensitive letting can create some 'mix' and cohesion in certain areas can the allocations policy do more in creating mixed communities?
- What can we do to reduce demand or at least focus it on applicants whose needs we can meet with our current and future housing supply.
- How can we reconfigure the stock to meet need including making tower blocks more 'attractive' and re balancing the supply of flats with houses.

From a tenancy management perspective, we know the overwhelming majority of demand on the service relates to a minority of tenants requiring help and support to manage their tenancies and rent accounts. UEA research commissioned by the council highlighted the risk factors that can help allocate resources in anticipation of early problems and issues and how greater use of data can identify where resources should be targeted.

We also know that although our void turnaround rate is among the top in the UK, one in three new tenants is dissatisfied with their new home at the start of the tenancy.

Our core function in terms of rent is to make sure people can and do pay. Rent should not be seen as an optional payment but a building block for living independent, active lives.

**Future actions to address the challenges** we will:

- Build on the undoubted pride people feel about Norwich Council housing, its history and traditions or encourage it where it may be lacking. We can do this by making sure Council homes are a positive housing choice not housing as last resort.

- Value the principle that the landlord role should respect a tenant's right to quiet enjoyment, fulfil our obligations as a landlord, champion tenants' rights and involvement and play our part in ensuring people can live in peace with their neighbours, live safely in well cared for neighbourhoods.
- We will maximise the ability of tenants to do business with us digitally where desirable and necessary but be mindful that not everyone can.
- We will continue to provide timely money advice to people to maximise income and minimise cost to families who may be struggling to make ends meet.
- Our properties will be well maintained throughout the life of the tenancy but will be of a **Norwich standard** at letting.
- Seek to ensure support is available where it is needed and avoid a one size fits all approach.
- Target our support and interventions with the aim of helping everyone enjoy a healthy tenancy.

As a guiding principle we will make sure all tenants get value for money by securing the best value on the things that we do including the management of our properties. A key indicator of success will be to maximise the productivity of the housing management service by decreasing the management cost per property year on year whilst maintaining high levels of service performance.

We will:

- Develop our 'specialist support' function to help support and encourage independent living and sustainable tenancies. Develop specialist support as a continuum of our management approach so that information advice and support follows people not properties.
- Invest in technology to provide a comprehensive digital service for self serve and officer efficiency and effectiveness
- Develop a comprehensive range of tenant involvement techniques that seeks to engage all tenants in the management and shaping of the services available Develop and adopt a Norwich Standard property at the time of letting
- Review our allocations policy to broaden the appeal of Council Housing and help families get started.
- Allocate resources to incentivise downsizing where tenants under occupy properties.
- Apply our disabled adaptations funding to help improve independent living outcomes.



- Upgrade our lettings offer by maximising information and improving presentation and developing a range of other options that are available.
- Move way from an enforcement driven tenancy management model and *adopt a new approach to tenancy management* based on a ‘healthy tenancy’ outcome and driven by an agreed model of support and self-management.

## Goal 4 - Improving our neighbourhoods

The housing service sits within the neighbourhood directorate and, in addition to the HRA expenditure on local open and communal amenities, also invests in wider projects which benefit the whole neighbourhood. Indeed, in the 2019-20 financial year a £1million budget was set (an increase of 300%) to target areas in need of enhancement. This is in addition to our ongoing programmes to improve community safety and deter crime.

Irrespective of this, the council’s neighbourhood model of service delivery provides opportunities for the council to make best use of all of its resources including, integrating services where appropriate, and targeting need and delivery being as cost effective as possible.

The model also provides an opportunity to more effectively deliver against the current neighbourhood strategy objectives. These are that a successful, sustainable **Norwich Standard** neighbourhood will be:

- clean and well cared for by the community and the council
- feel safe to live in and move around
- contain community facilities and activities that cater for the needs of its community; whether young, old or with special or particular needs and interests
- have local people who take responsibility for their own lives and those of their family
- Have lively challenging community organisations that champion the needs of the people and the neighbourhood and who work to meet those needs independently.

The directorate uses the following principles to shape and inform delivery:

- Developing integrated functions across the services for ASB and public space management
- A move to self-serve and encouraging residents to be more responsible and self sufficient
- Allocating resources according to need, demand and risk
- Having specialist teams supporting front line roles
- Taking a case work approach
- Reducing bureaucracy, duplication and hand offs between teams
- Getting it right first time
- Being visible within the community
- Managing expectations
- Establishing structures within cost parameters
- Having the right people with the right skills aptitudes and competencies

- Delivering the council's neighbourhood strategy

Our neighbourhoods are overall relatively clean and well cared for though there exists some problematical locations. We continue to look at ways to improve them to ensure we meet our obligations and the standards we set – albeit within the resources available to us.

The directorate has set a robust performance framework to drive improvements and residents satisfaction.

The HRA will continue to contribute to this joint work and work across other priorities. In particular we need to ensure that HRA spending power does not only deliver first class services but that the Norwich £ can add value to the local economy. As our services are brought back to the City council we will:

- Continue to make sure our neighbourhoods are clean, safe and active developing a **Norwich standard** for our neighbourhoods.
- make sure our community assets like shops, communal areas and green spaces are seen as contributing to the neighbourhood and valued by local people
- Work to make our procurement processes maximise the benefit to the local economy and increase local employment and business opportunities.
- increase the number of apprentices and employees drawn from our neighbourhood and estates

## Resourcing the strategy

We have assessed the resources we expect to be available to all partners in order to deliver our strategy over the next 30-60 years. These include:

- Capital expenditure for improving housing standards and subsidising the delivery of new affordable homes.
- Maximising use and spend of retained right to buy receipts
- Funding available to enable people to move to more appropriate accommodation making best use of existing homes.
- Value of developer contribution towards the delivery of new affordable homes through land, housing units and commuted sums.
- Homes for England subsidy for delivery of new affordable homes.
- Land supply for new affordable housing delivery in terms of the expected number of units from public land holdings, developer contributions and private sector empty homes.

- Revenue funding from key partner agency budgets, Government grants and incentives and Supporting People funding.
- Staffing capacity dedicated to strategic housing employed within local authorities, contracted agencies e.g. home improvement and housing advice agencies and partners eg housing associations.

## Conclusions

To deliver our objectives means that we will be and need to be a housing provider and housing authority that is recognised as a financially resilient, high performing service with high levels of citizen engagement and satisfaction and seen by members, staff and partners as a great service to work with and for.

Set within the wider corporate work we will spell out the improvements in the way we work and the things we achieve each year. Our proposed actions will be detailed in an corporate plans, an annual action plan and individual service plans.

Working as part of one council and furthering the values of the council we can make sure we can deliver on the things we set out to achieve our stated goals to develop answers to the questions and solutions to the problems.

- **Meet Housing need and delivering new homes.**
- **Maintain and improve the condition of existing housing**
- **Improve the use and management of our existing housing stock**
- **Improve our neighbourhoods.**

**In turn to achieve our ambition “to provide good quality, well maintained affordable homes to meet local housing needs within a safe, clean and well cared for neighbourhood’**

**We want to make a difference to peoples’ lives by promoting independent living and to build sustainable communities, where people take responsibility for their own lives and those of their families”**