

## East Devon Housing Strategy 2016-2020

Our over-riding vision	A decent home for all residents of East Devon		
Our responsibilities	To provide a housing options service for all who are homeless or threatened with homelessness	To provide, maintain and manage our own council housing stock	
	To work with housing developers and housing associations to deliver more affordable housing	To regulate and improve other social rented, private rented and owner occupied housing	
<b>Our priorities</b>	<b>To have consistently satisfied customers</b>		
	<b>Providing homes</b>	<b>Improving homes</b>	<b>Improving communities</b>
	<p>prevent homelessness and make sure that accommodation is found for those who do become homeless</p> <p>provide a range of affordable housing to meet housing needs</p> <p>widen the choice of housing, especially for those in priority need</p>	<p>bring sub-standard housing (of all tenure) up to current standards</p> <p>improve the use and safety of housing</p> <p>improve the sustainability and energy efficiency of housing and eliminate fuel poverty</p> <p>enable elderly people disabled people and people with special needs to live as independently as possible and remain in their own homes if they so wish</p> <p>maintain and manage the council owned housing stock to a high standard, actively involving tenants in all aspects of the service.</p>	<p>support the improvement and regeneration of local communities by encouraging social inclusion, involving children and young people with housing issues, and enabling residents to actively participate in their communities</p>

# 1. The context

East Devon District Council has a role within the local housing market as

- a landlord of over 4200 properties
- a regulator of standards within the private rented and owner occupier sectors
- the planning authority with a duty to bring forward more homes including more affordable homes
- the provider of a housing options service to help those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness

Key conditions<sup>1</sup> within the housing market influence standards and provision

- house prices are high (the average house price for the district being £270,982) and continuing to rise
- annual earnings are low (£23,171)
- within the South West as a whole households would need an annual pay rise of more than £30,000 to afford an average home
- private rents are also high (average monthly private sector rents almost £700)
- there are insufficient new homes being built
- there are a high number of second homes in the district

# 2. The key challenges ahead

## **Welfare Reform and changes to government policy**

We need to manage carefully the forthcoming changes to welfare benefits such as the introduction of universal credit, together with other likely further policy changes.

- As universal credit rolls out to all age groups there is the issue of claimants receiving payments directly and having to prioritise housing rent and charges above other demands. More council tenants may become overdue on their rent accounts which will have a negative effect on our income collection rates, and private sector tenants may also struggle to pay their rent on time. We may also see a rise in homelessness due to evictions arising from rent arrears.
- The government's policy of 1% rent reduction will continue to limit our income and therefore what we can achieve in terms of the aspirations we and customers have for the service.
- the government's drive towards home ownership is reducing the availability of social housing
- the government's likely move towards shorter term tenancies - we have already introduced flexible tenancies for some but if this becomes more widespread and secure/long term tenancies less common across social housing, there may be more pressure on the council as a provider of last resort

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<sup>1</sup> National Housing Federation Home Truths 2015/16 The housing market in the South West

- the reduced funding available for some other services means that housing is seeing an increased work load with, for example, the increased need for temporary accommodation, and support for older and vulnerable people such as those suffering with mental health issues.

### **Ageing Population**

This combined with our demographic profile will continue to shape our need for sheltered housing and excellent services to help maintain independence and sustain tenancies. We must keep ahead of this need and make sure we have the right accommodation and services to offer.

### **Developing alternative ways of delivering our services**

We need to find new ways to make best use of funding opportunities and deliver more affordable housing, as well as delivering our responsive repairs service in the most cost effective way.

We must promote our services to networks of other professionals and agencies, inspiring officers from other departments or agencies to 'deliver differently'.

As council owned stock decreases through the right to buy process we will need to seek other sources of income and new opportunities to help people into housing.

### **Adapting to change and working differently**

We must ensure that changes in our working environment, such as moving to different locations, working remotely and home working, do not adversely affect the service we offer to our residents and partners. This is also important with the introduction of more online facilities where residents can access our services from their own homes.

## **3. Meeting our priorities to 2020**

### **a. Providing homes**

**We will work towards having no homeless individuals or households by:**

- continuing to provide a wide range of housing options which are accessible to all
- maintaining our commitment to end rough sleeping
- addressing the wider causes and impact of homelessness
- providing help in finding rented accommodation in the private sector
- providing help to maintain tenancies or move to more appropriate housing
- providing permanent and accessible housing advice services in Exmouth and Honiton

**We will work to make sure that our system for bidding for housing, Devon Home Choice, is constantly reviewed and updated**

- the Devon Home Choice Management Board and the Operational Group meet bi-monthly and consist of representatives of all the social housing landlords that are signed up to Devon Home Choice

- there is now a mobile phone app for Devon Home Choice which alerts applicants if a suitable property becomes available
- we will activate and band all new applications well within the recommended time as set out within the Devon Home Choice Policy
- we will promote Devon Home Choice as the go to place for affordable housing
- we will support and assist individuals to complete their Devon Home Choice applications

**We are setting up a new housing company to expand our offer of housing into a range of tenures**

- The new local housing company, wholly owned by the council, will play a significant role in the local housing market and increase housing supply to meet the demand for good quality housing. Other key priorities for the new company will be to improve the quality of rented accommodation across the district, provide housing for sale and shared ownership, and setting standards for good housing design and management in the local housing market.

**We will work with local communities especially in rural areas to provide more community led affordable housing**

- use the community housing fund to provide 20-30 new community led housing dwellings across the district by 2020
- work with the Rural Housing Enablers to promote affordable housing in rural areas

**We will continue to use right to buy receipts and Housing Revenue Account reserves to purchase ex-council and other similar properties to add to our existing council stock**

- we aim to add approximately 20 homes per year each year to 2020
- we will consider providing alternative forms of accommodation, such as shared houses, where appropriate
- we will work in partnership with other providers to consider alternative forms of construction to deliver more affordable housing

**We will work in partnership with our colleagues and other organisations**

- with registered providers and developers to develop a range of sites in the district to deliver more affordable housing
- with our planning department to ensure policy compliant levels of affordable housing are provided and that the affordable dwellings meet the identified need in the district
- with other organisations working to tackle homelessness

- with other organisations to look at alternative tenures as proposed by Government (such as rent to buy and starter homes) and consider ways we can assess the need for these dwellings. This will enable us to make informed decisions on their inclusion in new developments

## **b. Improving homes**

### **As a landlord**

**We will ensure that we have a repairs service which is forward thinking and meets tenants' aspirations by:**

- The renewal of our repairs contracts and working with consultants, tenants and councillors to consider various delivery options to ensure we have a modern and efficient repairs service going forward
- working to our desired aims of 'right repair, right time' and 'fix and stay fixed'
- introducing the measurement of 'end to end times' for repairs to make sure we are addressing problems as quickly and efficiently as possible
- addressing the issues of greatest importance to tenants (identified during the tenant consultation for the renewal of the repairs contract) particularly better communication with tenants, a more flexible appointment system, calling or texting ahead of appointments, operatives calling when they say they will and requesting tenant feedback after repairs.
- bringing in new ways to measure customer satisfaction to make sure we collect and act on the views of tenants
- looking to introduce a new set of key performance indicators which will allow us to more accurately measure how well the repairs service is performing.

**We will continue to improve our existing stock through difficult financial times, constantly demonstrating transparency and value for money**

- Develop planned works programmes which will reduce expenditure and the number of ongoing reactive repairs
- Thinking more creatively and providing a range of attractive, energy efficient homes
- continuing to invest in our stock with the completion of a range of improvement programmes
- Adapting homes where necessary but also helping people to move to more suitable property where appropriate and possible

**We will continue to make sure all our properties are safe, meet all health and safety requirements and comply with all relevant legislation by**

- Carrying out an annual gas safety check in properties with a gas supply to ensure they meet current health and safety legislation
- Carrying out regular testing for legionella in our community centres and making sure our policy on legionella is fully implemented across all our housing stock

- Testing for asbestos when carry out work within our properties and implementing a programme to survey all properties for asbestos in the near future
- Regularly servicing such items as stair lifts, lifts, track hoists and other equipment installed in communal blocks or tenant’s properties
- Making sure that we meet all fire regulation standards and work with tenants to educate them on their responsibilities around fire safety

**We will continue to increase our range of digital technology and telecare devices to meet individuals’ needs**

- upgrade the alarm equipment on council schemes across the district, ensuring our sheltered stock is ready for digital advances as they happen
- provide a full range of telecare devices to customers (tenants and residents) so that our response service can be tailored to the needs of the individual, providing bespoke packages to help people retain their independence
- in conjunction with the NHS we will provide a ‘show home’ in Cranbrook to publicise what digital technology is available and the help this can give to people.

**Within the private sector**

**We will continue to improve housing standards across the district by**

- enforcing standards
- implementing licensing regimes where appropriate and in particular in houses of multiple occupation
- bringing empty homes back into use
- managing the rising demand for property adaptations and ensuring East Devon receives its share of the Better Care Fund allocation
- monitoring and improving the quality of private water supplies to keep people safe
- ensuring all mobile home sites are safe and meet the relevant licensing standards
- improving the energy efficiency of all homes, including mobile homes, to meet our aspiration of minimum level of energy usage
- regularly update our Private Sector Housing Plan

**We will enable people to stay in their own homes for longer by**

- Providing disabled facilities grants and loan assistance
- Delivering outstanding support services for all residents across the district
- dealing with customer emergencies promptly through our Home Safeguard service

**c. Improving our communities**

**We will work in partnership with support agencies and other groups to improve the lives of all residents across the district**

- continuing to support Early Help (previously called ‘Targeted families’) and helping people into work
- helping prepare young people for work through SWITCH job clubs
- work with the Council’s Countryside team to provide tenants with a range of experiences and activities they may not otherwise have
- facilitate connections between tenants and local services and build relationships with providers of services that benefit our communities, creating opportunities and building confidence and resilience.

**We will organise events to build relationships with and earn the trust of residents living on our estates**

- delivering programmes and events for young people, families, sheltered tenants and working age people across our tenanted areas
- creating repeated opportunities for residents of estates and blocks of flats to make new links with each other
- providing opportunities for residents to meet together and with local services, to help local people help themselves
- work to prevent social isolation within our elderly residents such as running IT lessons in our community centres and supporting the activities of the Mens’ Shed

**We will work to make residents feel safer in their own communities**

- tackling antisocial behaviour where it occurs on our estates
- working with the Antisocial Behaviour and Community Safety Coordinator and local police
- working with environmental health to serve community protection notices and public space protection orders where appropriate.

**We will work to tackle fraud of all kinds; the harm caused by fraud is not just financial – it damages local people and communities, and denies people a home of their own.**

- work with our corporate fraud resource and Devon Tenancy Fraud Forum to deter and prevent tenancy fraud
- seek Unlawful Profit Orders where appropriate
- data match with credit reference data to reveal where individuals are not living where they say they are
- require more comprehensive evidence of an applicant’s history and money as part of a right to buy process.

Our annual Housing Service Plan sets out how we will work to meet these priorities. This can be viewed on our website at .....

## **Related Policies**

The Council Plan

The Council Local Plan

Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

Housing Service Plan

Homelessness Strategy

Temporary Accommodation Procurement and Allocation Policy

Private Sector Housing Plan

Empty Homes Strategy

Resident Involvement Strategy

Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy