North Somerset Council Housing Strategy 2016-21


Introduction

North Somerset Council (NSC) is currently developing its new housing strategy to cover the period 2016-2021 and this consultation paper is an early step in its development.

As a housing service we aim to meet the housing needs of all residents in the district and our new strategy will become a flagship document in terms of meeting this aim. It will also contribute to the People and Communities Directorate’s mission to ‘improve the lives of others’. It will set out the vision and priority outcomes for the council and its partners to meet housing needs in the district.

We have assessed relevant local, sub-regional and national strategies and evidence that will affect the direction of the new housing strategy, in order to gain an understanding of what issues will need to be addressed in the coming years.

This paper sets out the issues we believe to be important and the proposed actions we intend to pursue; and invites your feedback on them.

This Issues and Proposals Paper consultation has two main objectives:

- To agree the main housing issues facing North Somerset.
- To consider the proposed actions

To help us, we want to know your views on the issues and proposed actions outlined in this paper. We have put a number of questions to you in a feedback questionnaire in Appendix A of this paper with contact details for its return. As well as answering these questions, please feel free to let us know any additional comments and ideas you may have to inform the development of our new housing strategy 2016-21.

The Issues

Below are the issues we have identified that will have an impact on our strategy for housing in North Somerset. We have only briefly covered each issue and the new strategy will give more details and more specific actions. If you feel we have missed anything, please let us know in the feedback questionnaire.

Issue 1 - Housing Affordability and Supply
- Lack of mortgage/deposit availability for those aspiring to own their own homes particularly where incomes are low
- Increasing private sector rents making the gap between local housing allowance and actual rent wider and limiting the supply of private rented accommodation available to those in receipt of LHA
- Welfare reforms limiting household benefits and fewer small homes being available for downsizing
- High number of households only able to afford social housing but with limited supply (approx. 3,500 household on NSC’s HomeChoice register)
- Viability continues to impact on affordable housing delivery

Proposed:

- Promote low-cost home ownership products and research and develop other options to access this tenure
- Continue to work with private landlords and review our current offer of support, leasing schemes and incentives to house those on a low income
- Continue to work with our Registered Housing Providers to supply good quality social housing and maximise Homes and Community Agency investment in the district
- Work with private house builders to look together at viability and improve options for delivery of housing

Issue 2 - Understand and improve housing options for vulnerable households and people with support needs

- Need to improve housing options for people with mental health issues
- Continuing need to seek housing options for people with learning disabilities
- Older people – improve types and tenures of housing available
- Finding appropriate housing for those leaving care and other vulnerable young people
- Updating evidence base of need and supply and type

Proposed:

- Work with colleagues in adults, children’s, mental health and health services to better understand the housing and support needs of vulnerable people and develop appropriate housing options
- Contribute to Registered Providers’ reviews of current housing for older people and look at new models of delivery and provision including progressing our current programme for extra care housing
- Use findings of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and other relevant data to inform strategies and plans and continue to contribute to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Complete the update of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment
Issue 3 - Making best use of existing stock

- Long term empties (over 2 years) difficult to bring back into use
- Need to maximise use of existing stock for those in housing need
- Under occupancy in all tenures
- Need to enable more people to 'stay put' or move if appropriate

Proposed:

- Review current incentives to bring empty properties back into use
- Maximise and promote the use of private sector leasing schemes to empty property owners
- Target under-occupancy in the social housing with our Registered Housing Providers
- Maximise opportunities for adapting homes or providing support services to enable people to stay in their own homes if this is an appropriate option for their needs or facilitate a move if necessary

Issue 4 – Preventing and tackling homelessness

- Number of households needing our help to prevent homelessness has risen over the last four years and whilst the number needing housing advice fluctuates it is currently higher than two years ago. However our prevention approach has ensured that the number of households who become statutorily homeless has remained at a low level
- Lack of affordable, suitable accommodation, including move-on for those with complex needs
- Increase in the use of temporary accommodation and lack of temporary accommodation including emergency accommodation for young people
- Loss of assured short-hold tenancies one of the main reasons for households presenting as homeless

Proposed:

- Continue to provide a comprehensive housing advice service which seeks to prevent households becoming homeless with relevant interventions
- Prioritise securing more private rented accommodation to avoid the use of temporary accommodation
- Research and monitor loss of assured short-hold tenancies to see if early intervention could prevent loss
- Encourage households to use 'self-serve' housing options and further develop the town hall 'Gateway' approach.
- Contribute to multi-agency work that can identify vulnerable people and households who may benefit from early intervention
Issue 5 - Improving living conditions in the private sector

- Around 25,000 homes in North Somerset do not meet the decent homes standard
- Particular concentrations of poor conditions and management of houses and houses in multiple occupation (HMO) particularly in Weston-super-Mare.
- Those on lower incomes tend to live in poorer conditions and limited choices to move and/or repair and maintain homes
- Energy efficiency and fuel poverty issues including those living in park homes

Proposed:

- Continue to work in partnership with West of England Care and Repair to target vulnerable households in need of assistance with repairs or adaptations
- Investigate options for further HMO/private rented sector licensing
- Target home improvement and energy efficiency assistance to areas where it will bring most benefit
- Works with landlords, home owners, partners and other agencies to ensure information on advice and loans for improvement are widely available
- Work with partners to attract and target resources to improve home energy efficiency including for those living in park homes

Issue 6 - Improving the residential offer in Weston Town Centre

- Creating high-quality residential developments within the town centre
- Improving existing stock – private rented sector and owner occupation
- Expansion of college – potential increase in students seeking accommodation

Proposed:

- Take a pro-active role in the town centre regeneration programme
- Research suitable products for home ownership and student housing (including working with Weston College on student demand for housing)
- Work with development partners to secure investment and innovative design.
- Target owners of commercial properties where there are empty flats/space above, offering options to bring them back into use

Issue 7 - Improving training and employment opportunities for those in housing need

- Potential to improve opportunities for employment and training in affordable housing developments
• Lack of work experience and training for those without qualifications

Proposed:

• Work with Registered Housing Provider partners to maximise opportunities for apprenticeships within affordable housing developments
• Complete ‘train and build’ project for ex service personnel in Worle
• Investigate potential for a ‘train and build’ for young people
• Work with Weston College and Team North Somerset to identify other opportunities for training and work including offering work experience within housing services

What next?

The above is just a brief outline of our thinking in developing our new housing strategy. The questions we would like your feedback on are:

• Have we identified what really are the key housing issues facing North Somerset? If not, what is missing?
• Are we taking the right approaches in dealing with these issues?
• What else should we consider doing?

Your feedback will inform our draft housing strategy and there will be a further opportunity to comment on the draft before the final strategy is published.

There is a feedback questionnaire attached to this paper at Appendix A for you to complete and email back to kevin.mulvenna@n-somerset.gov.uk, if you will like a hard copy of this paper and the feedback questionnaire please contact Kevin Mulvenna on 01934 427487
Appendix A

Feedback Pro-forma Paper

Please send your comments preferably on this pro-forma by email to: kevin.mulvenna@n-somerset.gov.uk

We would like your feedback on the issues and options/solutions. Please consider the questions below. As well as answering the specific questions below, please feel free to let us know any additional comments and ideas you wish to put forward. Annotating the Issues and Options paper would be another way to give feedback.

Have we identified what really are the key housing issues facing North Somerset? If not, what is missing or have we included any issues you feel should not have been?

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Are we pursuing the right proposed actions/solutions to tackle each of these issues? If not, what else could we be doing or are there any we should not include?

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Do you have an **additional** comments or ideas in relation to the new housing strategy 2016-21?