

REPORT TO: Environment and Regeneration Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 18th June 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Housing and Environmental Sustainability

SUBJECT: Production of a Borough wide Housing Strategy – Progress Update

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Provide the Board with an update on Production of a new Borough wide Housing Strategy.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board:

- 1) Note the progress being made with production of a new Borough wide Housing Strategy; and**
- 2) Promote participation in the Stakeholder and Formal Consultation process.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 At its meeting on the 18 April 2024, the Council's Executive Board approved commissioning and production of a new Borough wide Housing Strategy and supporting evidence base. In approving this process, it was acknowledged that the previous Housing Strategy was adopted in 2013 and covered a period up to 2018.
- 3.2 Following a formal tender exercise, Arc4 a housing research and policy specialist were commissioned to support the production process. Arc4 have supported over 100 local authorities to shape housing documents and bring a wealth of expertise and best practice. As noted in the 2024 Executive Board report, the Council currently does not have a dedicated strategic housing function. The external advice provided by Arc4 is therefore critical to help with internal and external consultations, and data collection and analysis.
- 3.3 An anticipated 12 month production period commenced on 1st September 2024. The production process is broadly split into two Stages:
- Stage 1 – The identification, gathering and analysis of supporting

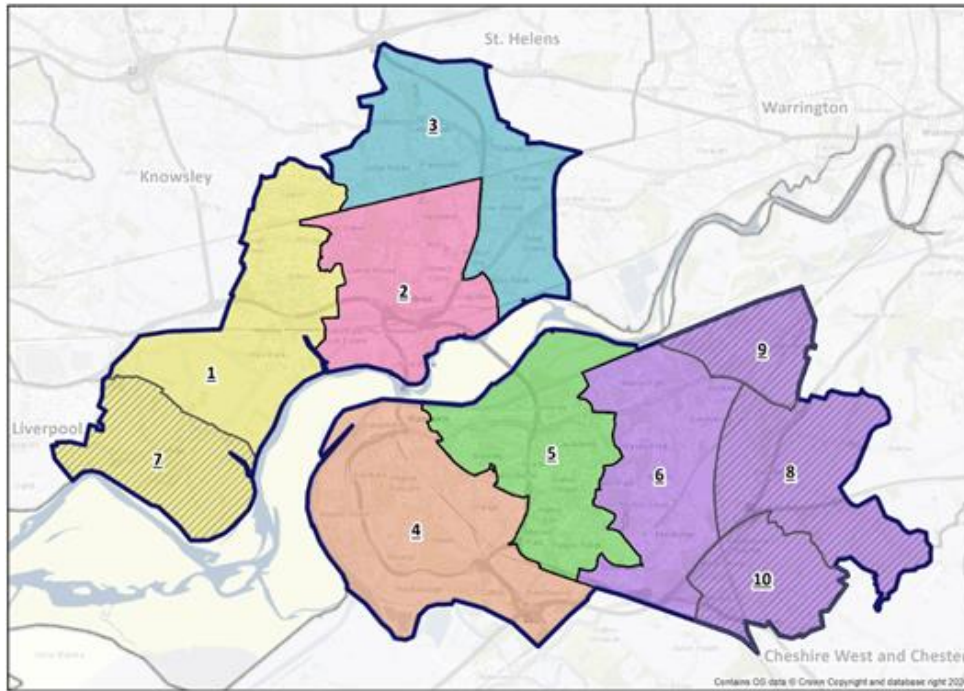
evidence base. This is called the “Housing Needs Assessment” (HNA) and include the undertaking of a Household Survey for residents in Halton; and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders such as housing developers, social housing providers, letting agents, third sector and lived experience groups. This ensures compliance with Government requirements for a robust housing strategy and HNA.

- Stage 2 – Strategy Production. Based on the findings and analysis of Stage 1 a draft Housing Strategy will be prepared. This will be followed by an informal period of stakeholder engagement and then a formal six-week public consultation.

3.4 Stage 1 has now concluded with the HNA being finalised. The HNA will be published alongside the draft Housing Strategy, as the anticipated timetable set out in paragraph 3.7 below. A key part of the HNA is undertaking a survey of existing data (secondary) data including 2021 census data and demographic analysis to inform understanding of current and future housing need; and, assessing the affordability of purchasing and renting a home in Halton. This was complemented by a comprehensive Household Survey sent to 16,530 households between November and December 2024, with 1,620 useable responses received. This provided a 9.8% response rate with a 2.4% sample error at borough level. The survey can be considered a robust data source. The survey covered four broad themes:

- Your home, neighbourhood, and household (including the need for adaptations, level access and supported accommodation).
- Housing history.
- Future housing requirements: whole household; and
- Future housing requirements: newly forming households

3.5 The main purpose of the survey is to provide evidence to help assess housing need by type, size, and tenure within different parts of the Borough (sub areas). This includes homes in different tenures such as social and affordable housing to rent and buy; as well owner-occupied and private-rented housing. It also considered the housing needs of older people and those with additional needs, such as the need for properties with adaptations and level access, and future demand for supported accommodation. The geographical sub areas are indicated below:



- 3.6 Achieving a statistically robust HNA is important, as the document will not only be used to inform the policies and priorities within the Housing Strategy but also form part of the evidence for any future Review of the Local Plan (Spatial Plan for Halton). Supporting justification for Planning Policy such as: Affordable Housing requirements; need for level access and adaptable homes; and mix of houses sizes built in the Borough.
- 3.7 The Housing Strategy is currently within an internal drafting process which needs to conclude before a draft strategy can be shared. The next planned milestones in the production process being:
- June/July – Internal stakeholder consultation (including selected partners) and final drafting.
 - July/August – Formal 6 week public and stakeholder consultation period.
 - September/October – Final revisions and Adoption process.
- 3.8 As part of the internal stakeholder process a Members Seminar took place in June to present the findings of the HNA and provide recommendations in terms of housing policies and interventions to respond to those findings.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Priority Six of Corporate Plan is “Valuing and appreciating Halton and Our Communities – Supporting Halton’s residents to live in decent and affordable homes, surrounded by safe and thriving communities”. Whilst as a Local Authority we no longer directly build or own housing, we do have a range of statutory and non-statutory services and responsibilities with a housing dimension. These are set out below:



4.2 The fundamental purpose of the Housing Strategy is to set out and coordinate policies and actions across these services and responsibilities to realise the Corporate Plan and respond to community needs. In line with the Corporate Values Framework, the Housing Strategy will define the Council's role in delivery and how we will work with our partners and stakeholders. It is anticipated that it will be a five-year Strategy 2025 – 2030. The Strategy will be accompanied by a delivery plan and set out priorities for implementation.

4.3 Early findings from HNA, has identified a number of potential prioritises for the Housing Strategy and these will be reported on verbally at the meeting.

4.4 The production of the Housing Strategy coincides with changing national housing policy and legislation. This includes the Renters Rights Bill (2025) currently going through the Parliamentary legislative process. This Bill is intended to transform the private rental sector and anticipated to introduce new responsibilities for the Council, including expanded enforcement powers and inspecting and enforcing compliance with new Decent Home Standards. The Strategy will seek to respond to these changes and the anticipated additional resource needs.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 A driver for the Strategy is how the Council can work more effectively across its housing services and responsibilities to improve the Council's financial position by both:

- a) Reducing council revenue expenditure, such as costs associated with homelessness and specialist accommodation; and
- b) Increasing council revenue income, through accelerating housing delivery and diversifying the housing offer.

- 5.2 Given these drivers, it is possible that an 'invest to save' case will be made for implementation of some aspects of the Housing Strategy.
- 5.3 The Housing Strategy is likely to influence the way we use Council owned land and buildings, and in turn, affect Capital Land Receipts. Disposal of land to meet a particular supported housing needs, may reduce capital values, but in turn reduce the Councils revenue expenditure through cutting use of out of Borough or unsuitable accommodation placements. The Council are already beginning to implement this approach such as with the Kingsway Quarter, Widnes (incorporating older peoples independent living) and Crow Wood Lane, Widnes (Support accommodation for adults with complex needs). Each land disposal being approved through the governance process on a site-by-site basis and aligned with specific strategies such as the Children and Young People Sufficiency Strategy.
- 5.4 Successful Implementation of the Strategy will require coordination across the Council and with our partners. Gaps in organisational capacity already identified include improving the interface between the 'People' aspects of housing responsibilities (specialist housing requirements) and 'Place' aspects housing responsibilities (working with developers and Social Housing providers to deliver homes). Any recommendations to resourcing any strategic housing function or other organisational changes (to facilitate working differently) will be covered in the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan. The need for further work on organisational capacity has not been ruled out.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Housing standards and conditions is recognised as a wider determinant of Health and wellbeing outcomes of people. The Housing Strategy will seek better integration of health and housing policy and provision.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

The choice, quality and affordability of the Borough's housing offer is a foundation stone for a strong and sustainable local economy. The Housing Strategy will support this.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Adequate and safe housing provides the security to enable children, young people and families to thrive. The Housing Strategy will support achieving this.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Provision of affordable and specialist housing is important to supporting individuals and communities who are most vulnerable. The Housing Strategy will ensure the Council and partners are more responsive to community needs.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Opportunities to support the Affordable Warmth Agenda will be integrated into the Housing Strategy.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Realising this Priority is the fundamental purpose of the Housing Strategy.

7.0 Risk Analysis

- 7.1 There are no significant risks associated with the production of a new Housing Strategy.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 There are none.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Heating and energy use in homes accounts for approximately 15% of carbon emissions within the UK. The Housing Strategy will seek to support delivery of the housing matters set out within the Climate Change Action Plan. This will include policy to support residents in Halton to access grants to help make their homes warmer and use less energy for heating (the Affordable Warmth Agenda). The Strategy will also support a housing offer which gives residents choice to live more environmentally friendly and sustainable lives. Such as through opportunities to improve the choice and quality of housing offer within Borough's town centres.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
A Housing Strategy for Halton (2013 – 2018)	Council Website	Nathan Renison, Regeneration Team