

Sefton Housing Strategy

2016 - 2021



INTRODUCTION



“Housing should provide a secure foundation for individuals to live the lives they want to live. Finding the right home, in the right place, can be an essential platform for people seeking to support their families and sustain work”¹.

Within Sefton access to suitable housing, which is of good quality and affordable, is a key priority for all its residents and communities and this strategy sets out ways to identify and more importantly deliver improvements.

The Borough faces significant challenges ahead with changes to statutory duties for the Authority already felt through the Localism Act, the Welfare Reform Act and the Care Act. Alongside these legislative changes, a significant reduction in Local Authority funding has been experienced within Sefton, reducing the resources available to deliver local services. This strategy will also need to respond and adapt to future changes brought about by a devolved Liverpool City Region, including the potential development of a city region housing strategy. It will also need to respond to the challenges arising from the Housing and Planning Bill. This Bill introduces legislative changes to various housing strategy priorities set out in this document, therefore an early review of the strategy may be necessary if the Bill becomes an Act without any further alterations.

Demographic population changes also present key housing challenges to the Borough. Evidence from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment² and Older Persons Housing Strategy Research³ identify that meeting the needs of an aging population will be one of Sefton’s principal housing issues in the coming decades. The number of people aged 65 and above is expected to increase by 36% from 2012 to 2030⁴. Other demographic issues regarding; increases in the proportion of people with a disability, the changing characteristics of BME households, changes to family household structures and young person households have been identified through evidence, and will be addressed in this strategy document.

The recent review into the Local Authority role in housing supply⁵ - has suggested that Councils should take a more central role in providing new homes by setting out a clear vision for housing development in their areas. The Council should be proactive in identifying housing needs and share ideas and experience whilst actively use their own assets and knowledge to deliver more homes and build stronger communities.

Recognising the challenges ahead, the housing strategy will be delivered in partnership with a range of key stakeholders who provide, own and manage new or existing housing as well as providing housing services. At a time when Sefton’s own capacity to deliver services is reducing, it is important that the Council can shape the work of partners who can provide housing related services, and those who actually provide new or existing housing.

Finally, housing plays a key economic and social role in improving the lives and wellbeing of residents through economic regeneration, direct job creation and improving the quality of existing homes and the neighbourhood environment. This housing strategy will identify Sefton’s vision and priorities and provide a performance framework to monitor the robustness and success of these policies over time.

DEVELOPING THE VISION FOR SEFTON

The vision for housing in Sefton by 2020 is to – ***“Continue to make Sefton a great place to live, by ensuring that people can access high quality housing appropriate for their needs”***.

It is important that this strategy does not just look at the provision of housing, but concerns itself with how housing policies can improve the local environment and quality of life for the benefit of all residents. Within this context we recognise that housing activities need to support the Council’s key high level strategies – the Local Plan (2012-2030) and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2013-2018). These top level strategies will help ensure:

- ***“The delivery of additional market housing and affordable housing in the borough, to help meet the needs of Sefton’s changing population, including families, the elderly and other vulnerable people with special housing needs”***⁶;
- ***“To support older people and those with long term conditions and disabilities to remain independent and in their own homes”***⁷;
- ***“To seek to address the wider social, environmental and economic issues that can contribute to poor health and wellbeing”***⁸.

Key Themes and Housing Priorities

To address Sefton’s future housing challenges, five strategic housing priorities and key themes have been identified through consultation and evidence gathering. Sefton’s previous Housing Strategy (2009-2013) has also been reviewed and updated to ensure a measure of continuity and reflect on the past successes.

- ***Driving housing quality in communities and neighbourhoods;***
- ***Meeting people’s housing needs;***
- ***Enabling people to live independently;***
- ***Tackling barriers to obtaining suitable housing for the most vulnerable and ensuring equal access to housing services;***
- ***Effectively utilising Council assets to support housing delivery.***



PRIORITY THEME: DRIVING HOUSING QUALITY IN COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

Improving the existing housing stock in Sefton is a key priority. Higher quality housing can bring direct benefits to households, neighbourhoods and communities. Although the Council does not own or manage housing stock, we will wish to work with and encourage others across all types and tenures of homes to raise housing standards, address energy efficiency, reduce fuel poverty and decrease the number of 'non-decent homes'. This strategic priority may also help to tackle the number of empty homes in the Borough, reducing negative impacts on neighbourhoods and help increase the number of available homes.

Our priorities include:

- **Raise housing standards across all tenures and reduce the number of non-decent homes with particular focus on the worst conditions including;**
 - **Improving the quality of privately rented sector (PRS) homes⁹ and;**
 - **Regulating and improving Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) through mandatory licensing.**
- *Working with Housing Associations to agree approaches to improve the assets and services of Housing Association's owned stock;*
- *Reducing the numbers of empty homes and neighbourhood empty homes 'hot-spots'.*

We will achieve this priority over the next five years by:

- *Working closely with private sector landlords to encourage them to provide high quality homes and management services;*
- *Attract high quality private landlords to invest in the Borough;*
- *Provide support and guidance to owner-occupiers to help them improve their housing standards, particularly the most vulnerable in the worst housing conditions;*
- *Using evidence to identify concentrations of privately rented sector stock that are associated with conditions which would justify considering the introduction of a Privately Rented Sector selective licensing scheme;*
- *Working in partnership with Sefton's Housing Associations to ensure that they provide the best quantity, type and quality of housing, together with the most appropriate services;*
- *More effective use of the Council's Planning and Licencing statutory powers to help improve Homes in Multiple Occupation (HMO) where necessary;*
- **Providing advice and support to help reduce fuel poverty by making existing and new homes more sustainable and energy efficient and encourage the use of renewable technologies to achieve this;**
- *Helping empty property owners to bring their properties back into use through advice and assistance, including early intervention and preventative measures. Where this is not effective, a targeted approach alongside a range of enforcement powers would be used to help bring longer term and problematic empty homes back into use¹⁰.*

PRIORITY THEME: MEETING PEOPLE'S HOUSING NEEDS

This priority looks at how we can increase the supply, mix and quality of new market homes, low cost homes as well as Affordable Housing. This increase in overall housing supply will encourage a greater choice of homes that meet the needs of existing and future residents. Additional housing is an important factor in allowing demand to be met across all tenures and improve flexibility, and importantly help to develop more mixed and sustainable communities. The Council wants to oversee the development of high quality new homes in areas where people want to live.

Our priorities include:

- *Securing the development of appropriate housing and attracting housing investment in the Borough;*
- *Attracting and encouraging effective working relationships with appropriate housing development partners;*
- *Working with partners who can help those people who aspire to own their own homes;*
- *Working with partners to develop affordable housing;*
- *Exploring innovative methods to boost the housing supply, across a wide range of tenures.*

We will achieve this priority over the next five years by:

- *Attracting a variety of high quality developers into Sefton to deliver high quality homes and neighbourhoods;*
- *Identifying and assessing different funding and finance opportunities to help secure development;*
- *Working in partnership with developers who can provide housing products and services that help aspiring householders to access home ownership;*
- *Working in partnership with housing associations to identify appropriate housing locations and develop a greater quantum and range of affordable housing;*
- *Ensuring Planning policies help deliver Affordable Housing either on development sites or in exceptional circumstances through financial contributions to deliver on alternative sites.*
- *Assessing the potential of alternative home building methods through custom and self-build schemes (links to the effective use of Council assets priority - page 8).*



PRIORITY THEME: ENABLING PEOPLE TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY

This priority will help Sefton to provide an effective response to the longer term demographic changes that will affect the borough including; significant increases in older populations and a decrease in the working age population. This housing priority addresses how appropriate housing can be provided to support the future needs of specific groups within the local population, through the provision of specialist housing or adaptations to existing homes (such as better and further use of assistive technologies), to ensure that people can continue to live independent, self-sufficient and healthy lives.

Our priorities include:

- *Responding to long-term demographic changes - A significant increase in older populations often with more complex needs;*
- *Providing appropriate housing to support future population needs for example; independent living and striving for lifetime homes standards;*
- *Reducing health inequalities through improved housing;*
- *Meeting the housing needs of the most vulnerable groups, such as those with mental health issues, learning and physical disabilities or those leaving care.*

We will achieve this priority over the next five years by:

- *Integrated working with health and social care partners to identify the appropriate housing and housing investment required;*
- *Implementing solutions and recommendations as set out within the Older Persons Strategy Research Study Action Plan (2015) including suitable 'Extra Care' housing;*
- *Using Planning Policies to help ensure a proportion of all new development is suitable for older and the most vulnerable households;*
- *Providing suitable housing advice and support for vulnerable households to help enable them to live longer independently;*
- *Continuing to provide an effective aids and adaptations service to assist the most vulnerable;*
- **Working with partners to provide new housing for older populations and the most vulnerable groups in appropriate and accessible locations for local services and facilities;**
- *Working with landlords and support service agencies to provide a range of supported living accommodation for our most vulnerable.*



PRIORITY THEME: TACKLING BARRIERS TO OBTAINING SUITABLE HOUSING FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE AND ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS TO HOUSING SERVICES

This priority will meet the needs of more diverse communities within Sefton, supporting the needs of populations who are more vulnerable or not represented through the conventional housing market. This priority also seeks to address the issues of homelessness building upon the Council's adopted 5 year Homelessness Strategy (2013-18)¹¹ and also analyse the impacts of welfare reform.

Our priorities include:

- *Tackling all forms of homelessness including: Statutory homelessness, street homelessness and hidden homelessness;*
- *Providing more effective housing related support and advice services;*
- *Meeting the needs of more diverse and vulnerable communities;*
- *Providing greater access to affordable housing through improvements to Choice Based Letting schemes;*
- *Understanding impacts of housing welfare reform on Sefton's households, and exploring possible responses.*

We will achieve this priority over the next five years by:

- *Implementing Sefton's Homeless Strategy Action Plan by 2018, to reduce levels of homelessness, prioritise its prevention, ensure that sufficient accommodation is available to house homeless cases and provide the support, information and funding to address these issues;*
- *Continued development of information and advice services;*
- *Reviewing the existing Choice Based Letting Scheme with partners to assess where improvements can/should be made to help customers;*
- *Assessing the impacts of housing welfare reform and developing responses alongside partners to address these.*

PRIORITY THEME: EFFECTIVELY UTILISING COUNCIL ASSETS TO SUPPORT HOUSING

The Government's review¹² into the role Local Authorities could play as a housing delivery enabler highlights the ways in which Sefton Council can use its own assets to support housing delivery more effectively. Sefton should maximise the use of their existing asset base and help to support new homes and development through asset sales and helping to bring redundant land back into use. The Borough should also use its employee knowledge base and skills to support locally led, large and small scale housing schemes. Assets can be used to maximise social value, however, it must be recognised that the use of Council assets to achieve strategic aims must be balanced against the need to secure social and economic best value.

Our priorities include:

- *Reviewing and prioritising land and assets the Council owns/manages to help deliver housing and regeneration priorities;*
- *Developing effective land and asset delivery plans;*
- *Assessing the demand for Custom and Self-Build homes.*

We will achieve this priority over the next five years by:

- *Undertaking a review and cost benefit analysis of the developable land the Council owns. This should also include land that the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and other public sector agencies can utilise to deliver new homes in the Borough;*
- *Completing a Custom and Self-Build homes study in Sefton and development of an accessible register of demand. Making available serviced pilot plots for Custom and Self Build homes to meet the demand and also support the development processes;*
- *Developing land and asset delivery plans to i) analyse the best use of Council owned land to achieve the most appropriate housing schemes and ii) ensure these new homes are built as effectively and efficiently as possible;*
- *Establishing new ways of development using Council land to assist in the delivery of privately rented new builds, self-build and custom build homes (links to meeting people's housing needs priority - page 5).*



DOCUMENT REFERENCES

1. *Laying the foundations: a housing Strategy for England*
2. *Sefton Strategic Housing Market Assessment – 2014 JG Consulting*
3. *Sefton Older Persons Housing Strategy Research 2014 – North Star Consulting*
4. *Office for National Statistics – 2012 Sub-National Population Projections*
5. *The Elphicke-House Report – From statutory provider to Housing Delivery Enabler*
6. *Sefton Local Plan (2012-2030)*
7. *Sefton Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2013-2018)*
8. *Sefton Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2013-2018)*
9. *Sefton Private Sector Stock Condition Survey (2013)*
10. *Sefton Council Empty Homes Strategy (2014-2018)*
11. *Sefton Homelessness Strategy (2013-2018)*
12. *The Elphicke-House Report – From statutory provider to Housing Delivery Enabler*

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