



# Bracknell Forest Housing Strategy

**2023-2028**

**January 2023**

# Forward

I am delighted to present to you the Bracknell Forest Housing Strategy. This strategy sets out the Council's housing vision to address its future housing needs and how it will work with partners to ensure that residents have access to a range of good quality, affordable, homes.

This strategy links to a number of related policy documents and plans for Bracknell Forest that include the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026, the Ending Rough Sleeping Plan 2021, the emerging Local Plan, submitted for examination in December 2021, and the Bracknell Forest Council Plan 2019-2023. It sets out the main housing related issues we face and how we will respond to these through the priorities and objectives we have set for the next five years.

The ability to live in safe, stable, and good quality accommodation is fundamental to people's quality of life, opportunities and outcomes. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the degree to which housing impacts on people's health and well-being, and the importance of adequate living space and access to outdoor space. A steep rise in fuel costs during 2021/22 and the growing incidence of extreme weather events demonstrates the need to improve the energy efficiency of our homes and reduce carbon emissions. The current cost of living crisis, along with rapidly rising house prices and rents, underlines the importance of the Council's role in assisting families and young households struggling with housing and other costs.

This housing strategy sets out a commitment to increase the supply of good quality homes that are affordable, in attractive, well designed, communities. It outlines actions we will take to ensure we are making the best use of existing homes, by improving standards and safety, increasing energy efficiency, and supporting those who wish to remain living independently in their own homes, as well as those who need more specialist accommodation. Lastly, it details our response to the increasing number of households facing severe financial pressures who are at risk of homelessness.

We are making progress across a range of housing services: we have brought rough sleeping down to almost zero; homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation are both going down; 373 new affordable homes have been completed in the last three years and nearly 800 existing homes have been improved in the last two years. In addition, we are well-advanced in our plans for a new supported housing development for adults with a learning disability, have established new safe accommodation services for victims of domestic abuse, and are delivering additional homes and support for single people including former rough sleepers.

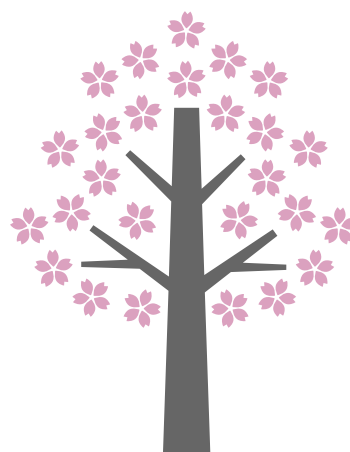
Many of these achievements are down to the close working arrangements we have developed with partners and colleagues. I want to thank all of our partners and look forward to your continuing engagement over the next 5 years as we look to deliver the objectives and actions set out in this strategy.



**Cllr. Dale Birch**  
**Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing**

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# 1. Introduction

The Housing Strategy brings together in a single document the various elements that make up the council's strategic housing function. The purpose of the Housing Strategy is to identify the key housing issues and challenges facing the borough over the next five years and to set high level priorities and objectives for the future across the full range of housing-related areas.

The vision for this Housing Strategy is that:

All Bracknell Forest residents are able to live in good quality, safe, and affordable homes, where they can be independent and financially secure, and can access the right support when needed.

In order to achieve this vision, we have identified four strategic priorities, which are to:

1. Prevent homelessness and increase housing options and support for households in need
2. Deliver new homes in sustainable communities that meet the needs of local residents
3. Make the best use of existing homes and improve housing quality
4. Provide a range of housing options for people with care and support needs

## How the strategy is set out

The strategy begins by outlining the main national changes to housing, welfare and planning policy that have taken place in recent years, along with the significant impacts on people's health, welfare and housing circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic and, most recently, the growing cost of living crisis. It also looks at the evidence and analysis of housing need locally, including population and demographic trends, house prices, income and affordability, and the underlying economic, deprivation and health context.

The four priority areas underpinning the strategy are then considered in detail. For each priority, the strategy examines relevant background and contextual information, reviews the available data, analysis, and findings at local level, and considers the role and activity of other partners. In each case, a high-level assessment of the needs and challenges is provided, along with a summary of work already underway, and the actions we need to prioritise over the next five years.



## 2. The development of the housing strategy

The development of the strategy draws on information and data from a range of sources:

- The Bracknell Forest Council Plan 2019-2023, which sets high-level housing objectives for the Council.
- Detailed evidence, analysis and findings drawn from a number of housing-related strategies, plans and policies.
- Analysis of recent demographic and housing data for the local area and national trends and policies.
- Consultation with stakeholders.
- The most recent data from our housing register and housing options systems.

The Housing Strategy brings together all areas of strategic housing operations and plans. It covers work with the private rented sector, the provision of aids and adaptations, specialist housing, older persons housing, the development of new housing and affordable housing, and work to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

The strategy links with several corporate and housing documents and reflects the priorities and actions identified within them. The starting point for the strategy is Bracknell Forest Council Plan<sup>1</sup>, which sets out at a high-level the aspirations and vision of the Council.

### Bracknell Forest Council Plan

The published Council Plan covers the period 2019-2023, and includes 6 strategic themes: value for money, economic resilience, education and skills, caring for you and your family, protecting and enhancing our environment, and communities. Under the theme of Communities, the council has identified the following housing priorities:

- preventing homelessness
- implementing a local action plan to reduce rough sleeping and homelessness
- delivering affordable homes that meet identified needs
- making best use of affordable housing provision to meet local needs

The Housing Strategy is the main vehicle for delivering the Council's housing objectives. It supports the Council Plan by setting out detailed plans for how these housing-related priorities will be achieved. This includes how we will develop services and homes that meet local housing needs, how we will ensure we are making best use of the existing housing stock, and how we will address current and future demands for specialised housing provision.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/strategies-plans-and-policies/service-planning-and-performance/council-plan>

The scope of the strategy is much wider than the services delivered directly by the housing service. It is relevant to the delivery of a range of services across the council, including planning, adult and children’s social care, public health, and environmental health. It also connects with services delivered by other providers, including health and criminal justice agencies, Registered Providers of social housing and voluntary sector organisations. It is relevant to many other service areas and agencies working to support people towards financial, social and economic independence, given the important role that housing plays in people’s health and well-being.

The Housing Strategy has four main priorities.

1. Prevent homelessness and increase housing options and support for households in need
2. Deliver new homes in sustainable communities that meet the needs of local residents
3. Make the best use of existing homes and improve housing quality
4. Provide a range of housing options for people with care and support needs

Much of the data, analysis and evidence required to inform the housing strategy is already available in housing-related plans and strategies that have been published or that are under development. These include the draft Local Plan<sup>2</sup>, policies on housing and affordable housing, the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy<sup>3</sup>, the Private Sector Housing Policy and the Housing Assistance Policy<sup>4</sup>. The Housing Strategy summarises and, in some cases, updates the findings in these documents, to provide a high-level analysis of housing-related issues in the borough.

The strategies and policies that contribute to each of the four strategic priorities are illustrated below.



<sup>2</sup> <https://consult.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/file/5926701>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-02/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-strategy.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-07/housing-assistance-policy.pdf>

The strategy has been developed in consultation with stakeholders including local partner organisations. Effective partnership is a fundamental part of delivering successful housing services, including homelessness prevention and a well-functioning private housing sector, and we are committed to continued joint working with our statutory, voluntary and community partners in order to deliver the ambitions of this strategy.

## **Equalities issues in the housing strategy**

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires public bodies to have due regard of the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The way in which services are designed and delivered and policies and plans are formulated must have regard for advancing equality by:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

This means that the development of the strategy should include explicit consideration of the diverse range of needs in the community and their impact on people sharing protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

An analysis of the equalities impact of the housing strategy on different groups within the community has been undertaken. This considers a wide range of evidence showing that some groups with protected characteristics experience higher levels of homelessness and housing need and other groups are more likely to require specialist housing or services, or need targeted forms of assistance, support or financial help, in order to meet their housing needs. In summary, it finds that:

- Women, some ethnic minority groups and young people are more highly associated with low incomes, which means they are at greater risk of experiencing housing and financial need; more likely to live in homes with poor housing conditions, lower energy performance and higher bills; less able to buy their own homes; and more reliant on social and private rented housing.
- People with disabilities and mental health conditions, some young people and care leavers and victims of domestic abuse are more likely to experience difficulty in meeting their housing needs without additional assistance in the form of dedicated support services, emergency short-term accommodation, or priority for longer-term rehousing.
- Older people, people with a disability or long-term health conditions, and larger families are more likely to require particular types of housing that may be in short supply in order to meet their housing needs, including accessible and adapted properties, specialist housing with care and support, and larger and affordable homes.

The detailed analysis is set out in a separate equalities impact document.

# 3. Setting the context

## 3.1 National context

This Housing Strategy has been developed in a context of evolving national policy and legislation in housing, welfare and planning. There is a wide consensus that the country faces a shortage of housing and rising house costs, meaning that much of what is available is unaffordable. The Government has sought to tackle these housing issues through legislation that seeks to boost new housing supply, reduce homelessness, improve housing conditions and standards for tenants, assist people into home ownership, and reduce carbon emissions in new and existing homes.

Some of the key policy interventions of recent years are outlined below.

### Reducing homelessness and supporting those in housing need

- **The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**
- **The Domestic Abuse Act April 2021**
- **The Rough Sleeping Strategy August 2018**

The [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#), regarded as the most significant change in homelessness legislation in 40 years, introduced new duties on councils to work with homeless households to prevent or relieve homelessness before a main homeless duty is accepted. Prevention and relief duties were extended to any household vulnerable to homelessness within 56 days (increased from 28 days), and to those actually homeless.

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) contains measures to promote awareness of domestic abuse, protect victims, including through the justice process, and ensure that safe accommodation is available to victims. Under the Act all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse are regarded as being in priority need under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002.

The [Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018](#) sets out the government's vision for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it entirely by 2027, following years of increasing numbers of people sleeping rough. The target to end rough sleeping has now been brought forward to 2024, with all local authorities required to produce an Ending Rough Sleeping Plan in 2021.

### Increasing the supply of new homes

- **Planning for the Future white paper 2020**
- **Written Ministerial Statement on First Homes 2021**
- **The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)**

The [Planning for the future](#) White Paper in 2020, proposed a “once in a generation” reform of England’s planning system and included a commitment to build 300,000 new homes a year, a quicker plan-making process, a shift to a new zone-based system and a national levy to replace the current system of developer contributions. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (see below) has largely superseded the White Paper proposals.



In May 2021, a written ministerial statement launched the implementation of [First Homes](#) in June 2021. First Homes are a type of affordable home ownership product available to first time buyers, with a minimum 30% discount on the full purchase price. All residential developments where an affordable housing requirement applies must provide 25% of this in the form of First Homes. However, the government introduced transitional arrangements for local authorities at an advanced stage of developing new local plans which exempt them from the requirements. Bracknell Forest qualifies for this exemption as it published and submitted its plan for examination before 28 December 2021.

[The Town and Country Planning \(General Permitted Development\) \(England\) Order 2015 \(as amended\)](#) sets out classes of development for which a grant of planning permission is automatically given. From 1 August 2021 a new change of use right was introduced which allows certain retail and business use classes to be converted to residential use. These changes are likely to have implications for the stock of retail and business premises in the Borough and nationwide.

### **Meeting housing, care and support needs**

- **The Care Act 2014**
- **2021 White Paper Integration and innovation: working together to improve health and social care for all**
- **The Children and Social Work Act 2017**

The central piece of policy relating to adults with care and support needs is the [Care Act 2014](#). It outlines how housing can support a more integrated approach to care and accommodation and the role of the Local Authority in shaping and developing the market for services to meet care and support needs.

The [Children and Social Work Act 2017 \(CSWA\)](#) sets out the corporate parenting principles to be applied when supporting children in care and care leavers and the requirement to publish a Local Offer, which sets out the services and the support available for care leavers. Local authorities have a duty to provide suitable accommodation for all care leavers aged 16 and 17.

The [2021 White Paper Integration and innovation: working together to improve health and social care for all](#) seeks greater integration and collaboration across services and proposes new Integrated Care Systems, to bring providers and commissioners of NHS services together with local authorities and other local partners to coordinate and plan services.

### **Improving housing standards and tenants' rights**

- **The Social Housing White Paper November 2020**
- **The Renters Reform Bill**
- **The Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (Prescribed Description) (England) Order 2018**
- **Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018**

[The Social Housing white paper 2020](#) proposed a new Charter for social housing residents and changes to the regulatory regime. The [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Bill](#), which was published in June 2022, gives the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) stronger powers to regularly inspect landlords on things such as health and safety and repairs performance and to order emergency repairs, with landlords footing the bill. Unlimited fines will be levied at housing associations and councils that are persistently under-performing, while the government will begin a programme of naming and shaming the worst culprits. Housing associations will be subject to a new Freedom of Information-style information-sharing process.

The [fairer private rented sector white paper](#) published in June 2022 aims to improve the situation of households in private rented sector accommodation by removing Section 21 of the 1988 Housing Act, which currently allows landlords to evict tenants without giving a reason, and blanket bans on benefit claimants or families with children. It will double notice periods for rent increases and give tenants stronger powers to challenge them and introduce a new ombudsman for private landlords to help resolve issues without having to go to court.

[The Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation \(Prescribed Description\) \(England\) Order 2018](#) reformed the mandatory HMO licensing regime, extending mandatory licensing to cover certain HMOs, including flats, occupied by five or more persons in two or more households, regardless of the number of storeys. It also prescribes minimum room sizes for the first time and maximum number of occupants permitted to use each room.

[The Homes \(Fitness for Human Habitation\) Act 2018](#) seeks to ensure that rented houses and flats are 'fit for human habitation', which means that they are safe, healthy and free from things that could cause serious harm. It gives tenants the right to take their landlord to court in cases where their rented property poses health risks, e.g. if their house or flat is too cold and cannot be heated. The Act applies to all tenancies created after 20 March 2019, with all existing tenancies being covered from 20 March 2020.

### **Reducing carbon emissions**

- **The Future Homes Standard April 2019**
- **The Heat and Buildings Strategy October 2021**

[The Future Homes Standard April 2019](#) introduced changes to Part L and Part F of the Building Regulations for new dwellings in order that from 2025 new homes will be zero-carbon ready. Homes built under the Future Homes Standard should produce 75-80% less carbon emissions compared with current levels.

The [Heat and buildings strategy 2021](#) sets out government plans to decarbonise homes and commercial, industrial and public sector buildings, including five core principles, to achieve a net zero carbon target by 2050.

- A whole-buildings and whole-system approach to minimise costs of decarbonisation
- Innovation to drive down costs, improve options and inform future decisions
- Future-proofing, building the market and technical expertise
- Providing stability for investment and enabling different approaches
- Targeted support to enable action for those in most need

Additional funding through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and Home Upgrade Grant aimed to improve the energy performance of low-income households' homes, support low-carbon heat installations, help reduce fuel poverty and build the green retrofitting sector.

## The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill 2022

In February 2022, the government launched its new levelling up agenda through the [Levelling Up the United Kingdom white paper](#). This flagship document set out the government's plans to spread opportunity more equally across the UK. Central to this are 12 "national missions" to be achieved, all by 2030, including:

- Increased pay, employment and productivity in every part of the UK
- Public transport connectivity
- A "significant" increase in primary school children's educational attainment.
- A "significant" rise in the numbers achieving high-quality skills
- A narrowing in healthy life expectancy between the UK areas
- An improvement in perceived wellbeing in all parts of the UK
- A rise in people's "pride in place" across the UK
- An increase in the number of first-time home buyers in all UK areas
- A fall in homicide, serious violence, and neighbourhood crime in the worst-affected areas
- A devolution deal for "every part of England that wants one".

One of the core missions relates to housing, stating: "By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership, with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government's ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50 per cent, with the biggest improvements in the lowest-performing areas". The decent homes standard is legally binding for social landlords only, but the white paper pledges to consult on applying this to the private rented sector, alongside a crack-down on 'rogue landlords'.

On 11 May 2022 the Government introduced to the House of Commons the [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill](#). The Bill proposes fundamental changes to local planning and infrastructure regulations, as well as measures to increase local devolution and levelling up. The Bill largely supersedes proposals set out in the previous planning white paper and is intended to pave the way to achieving the government's housing delivery targets. Some of the key proposals in the bill are:

- The national planning policy framework (NPPF) to be amended to remove the current requirement for a five year supply of housing land where the local plan is up to date to help "curb perceived 'speculative development' and 'planning by appeal'".
- A "simple, non-negotiable, locally set" infrastructure levy to replace the Community Infrastructure Levy and most S106 obligations to deliver affordable housing, schools, health care, roads etc based on gross development value rather than floorspace, with local authorities able to determine what portion of the levy they should receive 'in-kind' as onsite affordable homes through a new 'right to require'.
- Every local planning authority to be required to produce a design code for its area, which will have full weight in making decisions on development.
- New 'street vote' powers to allow residents to bring forward proposals to extend or redevelop their properties, in line with prescribed development rules and other statutory requirements, which will be put to a referendum of residents on the street, to determine if they should be given planning permission.
- National development management policies to be introduced on issues such as green belt and heritage protection.
- Local Plans to be given greater weight when decisions on applications are made.
- Compulsory purchase powers to be strengthened.

## Covid-19

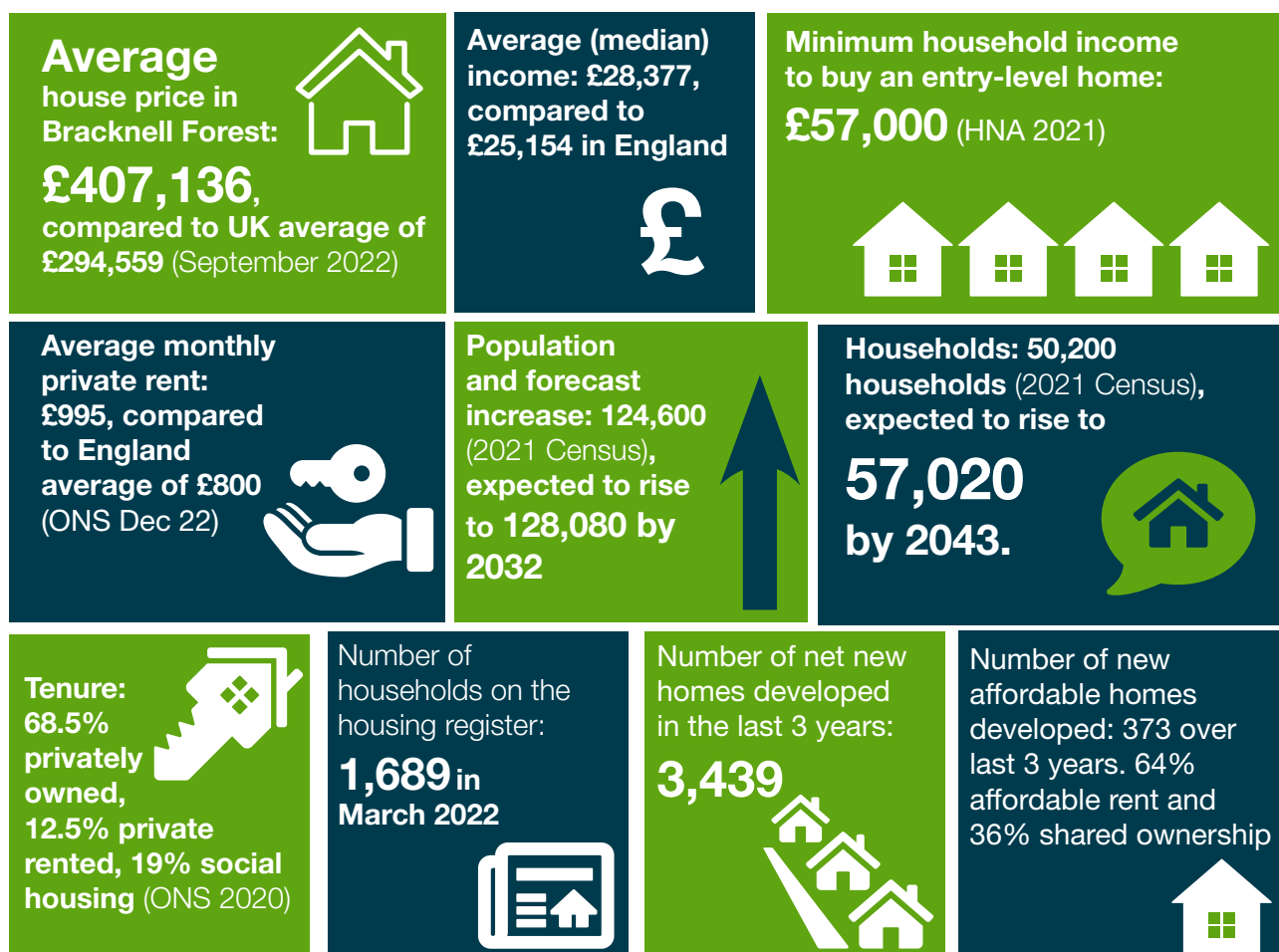
The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people's lives. Many areas of the labour market were affected, particularly the hospitality sector, with millions of people saved from unemployment by the introduction of the furlough scheme. The national housing market has changed as working from home became the new norm for many people, influencing commuting patterns and a desire for gardens and extra space for working. There were significant new pressures on housing services and other front-line Council service.

In terms of housing, the construction industry slowed for a period followed by sharp rises in the cost of labour and materials. The stamp duty holiday introduced in July 2020 stimulated rapidly rising house prices, especially in areas away from the large urban centres. Additional pressures on housing services resulted from a legal requirement to house everyone who was homeless during the pandemic, an increased number of single people seeking assistance and the challenge of adapting to providing homelessness services online. As things begin to ease in 2022, it is clear that the pandemic has brought about some long-term structural shifts in the labour and housing markets.

## 3.2 Understanding the local housing context

At a local level, housing is an important issue for the borough in terms of the health and well-being of local residents, its impact on the local economy, and the ability of Bracknell Forest to continue as a thriving, successful, place, to live and work.

### Key facts and figures for Bracknell Forest



Bracknell Forest is a unitary authority area in Berkshire, formed in 1998, which shares borders with the neighbouring areas of Wokingham, Windsor and Maidenhead, Hart and Surrey Heath. The administrative area of Bracknell Forest covers approximately 110 square kilometres and includes several large rural areas. It covers the two towns of Bracknell and Sandhurst and the village of Crowthorne, and also includes the areas of North Ascot, Warfield and Winkfield.

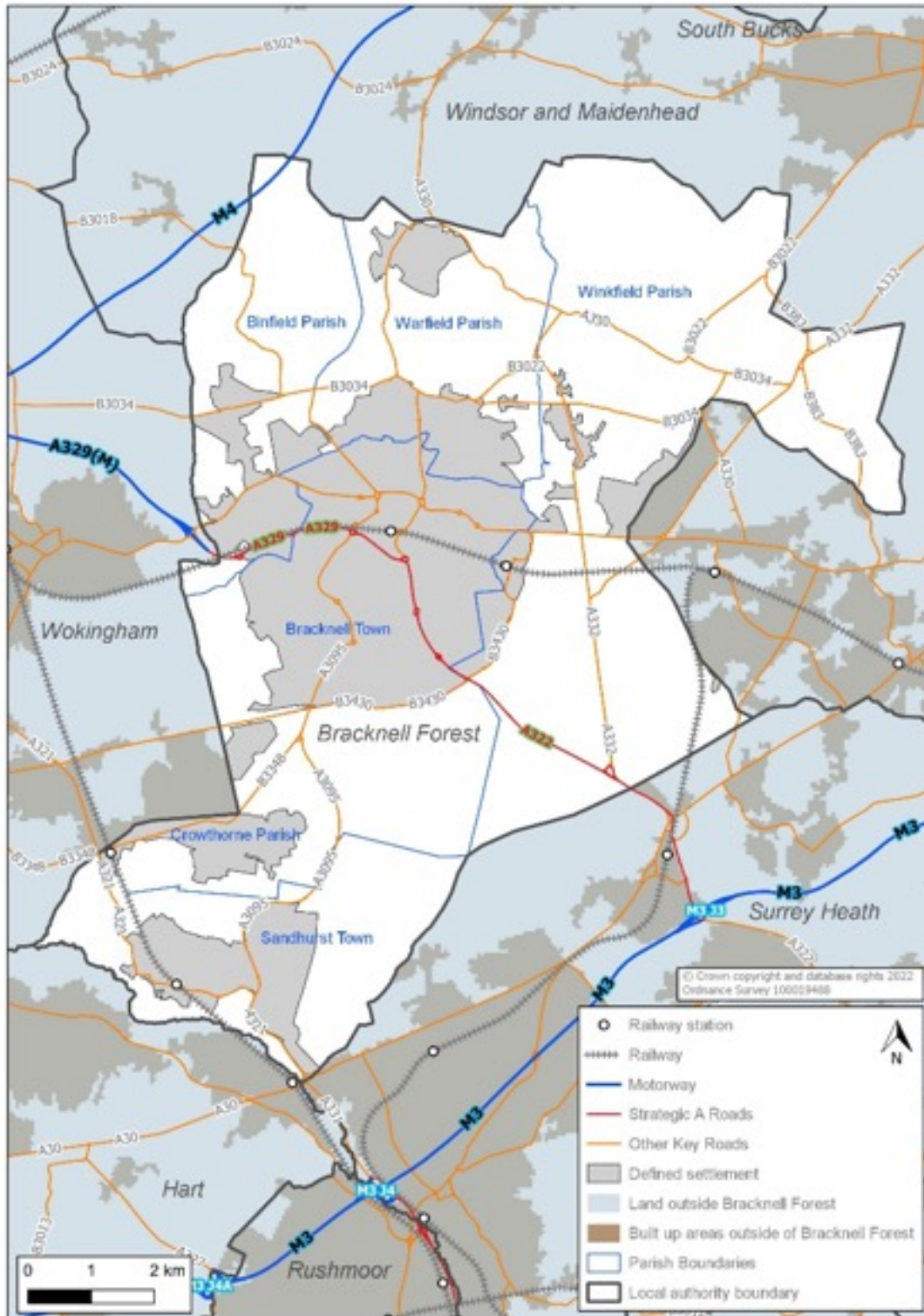
### **Population and household estimates**

Bracknell Forest has an estimated population of 124,600 (Census 2021), which is forecast to rise to 128,080 by 2032. The largest expected increase in the population is among older people aged 65 years and over. The number of people aged over 65 is projected to increase by 10,383 (57.7%) between 2019-36 with a substantial growth of 5,905 persons aged 75+ (Demographic projections ONS).

Bracknell Forest previously had a lower proportion of the population aged 65 or over than the national average. However, this is changing, as the early results from the Census 2021 show there was a 32.2% increase in people aged 65 or over since 2011, compared to 20.1% across England. Furthermore, the older population is forecast to continue to increase at a rate that is higher than the CIPFA Comparator average (34.1%) and average across England (34.6%). Alongside this there are expected to be rises in the number of people with dementia and people with mobility problems.



## Map of Bracknell Forest and surrounding areas



There are estimated to be 51,990 dwellings (ONS estimates 2020) in the borough. 68.5% are privately owned, 12.5% private rented and 19% are social housing (2020 ONS estimates). The estimated number of households in Bracknell Forest is 50,200 (Census 2021), an increase of 9.4% since 2011. By 2043, the number of households in the borough is expected to increase to a total of 57,020. Future population and household growth are driving a need for additional local homes.

## House prices

The average property price in Bracknell Forest in September 2022 was £407,136. This is much higher than the UK average of £294,559. Over the previous 12 months up to September 2022, property prices across the area rose by an average of 16%; over the last ten years, the average house price has increased by 69%. House prices vary by ward with the most expensive properties situated in Winkfield and Cranbourne (median price £610,000 in the year ending December 2021) and the lowest price properties in Wildridings and Central (median price £245,000). The lower quartile house price in Bracknell Forest across all dwelling types was £292,500 in 2021. The lower quartile cost of a flat in the area, which might be considered as the entry level price for first-time buyers, stands at £200,000.

## Average income and affordability

The estimated average (median) income in Bracknell Forest is £28,377, which is higher than the England and south-east region averages of £26,154 and £27,903, respectively. The lower quartile income is £17,284. Despite the relatively higher earnings, the high price of housing means that purchasing a home remains out of the reach of many working households. In 2020, the ratio of lower quartile house price to lower quartile gross annual (workplace-based) earnings was 9.62, which was above the figure of 9.34 for all English authorities. The Housing Needs Assessment undertaken in March 2021 suggests that a household income of £57,000 would be needed to be able to buy a home without financial support

## Private rented housing

Bracknell Forest has a relatively small proportion of its total housing stock available for private renting. The average monthly cost of private rented sector housing was £975 pcm across all dwelling sizes for properties let between October 2021 and September 2022 (ONS). This is higher than the England average cost of £800 pcm. The estimates for different property sizes are:

Table 1. Median monthly rents

Median monthly rent	Rent per week	Rent per month
One bed	£196	£850
Two bed	£242	£1,050
Three bed	£288	£1,250
Four bed	£398	£1,725

The Housing Needs Assessment found that for a lower cost two-bedroom flat to be affordable (defined as up to 35% of household income spent on housing costs), it is likely that a minimum annual household income of £30,857 would be needed.

## Economic activity

Bracknell Forest enjoys a thriving local economy. A higher than average proportion of its working age population are in employment. Although the proportion of working age residents in the Borough claiming Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) has been increasing since 2017, especially in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the rate in Bracknell Forest is significantly below the national average. This reflects growth within the wider area including investment in infrastructure and the impact of the on-going regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre.

The main businesses by industry in Bracknell Forest are construction (16.1%), Information and communications (16.1%), Professional, Scientific and Technical (20.4%) and Business administration and support services (11.1%). The largest employment sectors by occupation are 'professional occupations'. This reflects the predominance of businesses in the professional, scientific and technical sector and information and communications, in Bracknell Forest.

## Deprivation

In the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, out of 317 local authorities, Bracknell Forest is ranked at 284 and is one of the least deprived areas in England. The table below shows where Bracknell Forest ranks compared to neighbouring boroughs, with the least deprived boroughs at the top.

Local authority area	Overall ranking in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation
Wokingham	316
Windsor and Maidenhead	304
West Berkshire	289
Bracknell Forest	284
Reading	141
Slough	73

Bracknell Forest has no areas in the most deprived 10% in England. The greatest levels of deprivation within the area are in Wildridings and Central. These neighbourhoods are amongst the 30% most deprived LSOAs in the country. The types of deprivation scored most highly in Bracknell Forest relate to 'Barriers to Housing and Services'. This is unsurprising as affordability of housing is a key feature within Bracknell Forest which has a direct impact on levels of housing need and homelessness. There is also evidence of some localised issues, including a relatively high level of older people in poverty in Crown Wood and higher than average overcrowding in the wards of Bullbrook and Wildridings and Central.

## Health and well-being

The Bracknell Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026 sets out the vision for the future health and wellbeing of Bracknell Forest residents. Its twin aims are to reduce health inequalities and improve the health of people who live, work and study in the borough.

There are six priority areas in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy:

1. Give all children the best start in life and support emotional and physical health
2. Promote mental health and improve the lives and health of people with mental-ill health
3. Create opportunities for individual and community connections, enabling a sense of belonging and the awareness that someone cares
4. Keep residents safe from infectious diseases and address the long-term impacts of COVID-19
5. Improve years lived with good health and happiness
6. Collaborate, plan and secure funds for local and national emerging new health and wellbeing priorities.



Access to good quality housing is recognised to be one of the key protective factors in maintaining health and well-being. The Housing Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy therefore share some common goals and cross cutting themes, including the need to create healthy, well-designed homes, to improve social cohesion and to reduce deprivation, homelessness and relative disadvantage, all of which are associated with poorer health, including mental health.

## Climate Change

Bracknell Forest published its Climate Change Strategy in 2020 and has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2050. The council's climate change strategy provides a strategic framework, underpinned by annual action plans that are refreshed each year.

The strategy covers all areas of the council's work, including transport, housing, energy, waste and recycling, air quality, and employment. The action plan has 2 main strands:

- Reduce carbon emissions that are under the council's control
- Influence and lead community action against climate change

Bracknell Forest Council recognises that the success of this strategy relies upon the engagement and support of our residents, communities, local town/parish councils, local groups and businesses. This must be a joint effort – we need our partners to help us deliver the action plan and to take responsibility for achieving targets to help close the greenhouse gas emissions gap we are all facing up to.

## 3.3 Conclusion

National policies and legislation provide a constantly changing backdrop to the housing strategy, triggering new duties, standards and requirements. An understanding of the local demographic, housing and socio-economic context is important in identifying future housing challenges for the council. On the one hand, Bracknell Forest is a place of relative affluence and high levels of economic activity and employment. At the same time, there are increasing housing pressures due to the diminishing affordability of local housing for sale and rent, a relatively small private rented sector, and a rapidly growing older population, which is generating a need for specialist and accessible housing. In addition, there are some key public health and climate change issues that we need to address.

The demographic and housing context in Bracknell Forest

- Future population and household growth forecasts show that additional homes will be needed in the local area
- A growing older population will require an increase in housing with support in future
- New legislation and policies at national level are creating new duties for the local authority in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping, domestic abuse, social care, and management and standards in existing housing
- House prices and rents are rising much faster than earnings making the cost of existing and new housing unaffordable for many households
- Rising house prices are likely to impact on the local economy with the potential for employment shortages in some areas due to a lack of affordable housing
- Improving housing standards and reducing carbon emissions in new and existing housing are important priorities

These issues will be considered in more detail under each of the four priority headings in the strategy, alongside other supporting evidence, research and need assessments to identify the key housing challenges and priorities for the Borough.

# 4. Homelessness and housing need: Prevent homelessness and increase housing options and support for households in need

## 4.1 Why is this important?

People become homeless for a variety of reasons – they may be unable to pay the rent due to financial hardship or losing a job; life events such as relationship breakdown, mental or physical health problems, or an abusive relationship may push people into homelessness; or inadequate preparation for leaving care, discharge from hospital or release from prison. Whatever the cause, homelessness has an undoubtedly negative impact on people’s lives, well-being and opportunities.

There are also structural factors that shape patterns of homelessness in the local area and how it impacts on different groups of people. Changing housing market conditions affect the availability and cost of homes and government policies determine the forms of assistance available to people and their ability to access and sustain adequate housing.

Three particularly noteworthy developments affecting homelessness in recent years are:

- Government legislation in the form of the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act, which brought about a significant change in the approach to homelessness.
- The Covid-19 pandemic over the last two years, which fundamentally affected the health and well-being of households and communities across the country and led to new responses to reduce the risks of homelessness & rough sleeping.
- The impact of the cost of living crisis, with many families experiencing severe financial pressures that put them at risk of homelessness.

Preventing homelessness and assisting people to remain in or access suitable accommodation are key priorities for the Council. In 2021 the Council published a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and produced an Ending Rough Sleeping Plan. These documents provide detailed evidence and analysis of homelessness and rough sleeping and our plans to tackle them. In this section of the Housing Strategy, we provide a summary of the findings, updated to take account of the most recently available data, and outline the headline actions that we will take to reduce and prevent homelessness.

## 4.2 Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy 2021-2026

A detailed review of homelessness was undertaken in 2021, to inform the homelessness strategy. Some of the main findings were:

- Homelessness approaches have been increasing year on year since 2018, particularly among single people, including young people, care leavers and rough sleepers
- Lone parent households, larger family households and victims of domestic violence are also highly represented among those seeking help
- The two most common reasons for homelessness are the loss of a private rented tenancy and family or friends no longer being able to accommodate
- Domestic abuse as a cause of homelessness more than doubled in 2020/21.
- 55% of homelessness cases were successfully prevented which is higher than regional and national averages
- There was a rise in the number of households in temporary accommodation in 2020/21, coinciding with the covid 19 pandemic
- The number of people sleeping rough has dramatically reduced from 22 in 2019 to 2 in 2021

The homelessness strategy highlights three important developments that have contributed to patterns of homelessness in the local area:

- The passing of the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act which brought about a significant change in the approach to homelessness.
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the forms of assistance made available.
- The Everyone In initiative which aimed to provide all rough sleepers with emergency accommodation.

The 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act introduced new duties that placed a much greater emphasis on preventing and relieving homelessness at an early stage, reducing the use of the formal main homelessness duty. This has had the effect of significantly increasing the number of homelessness applications made to the council, from 120 in 2017/18 to 909 in 2020/21, a trend that is mirrored nationwide.

The Covid-19 pandemic fundamentally affected the health and well-being of households and communities across the country. It led to a rapid increase in the number of people claiming out of work benefits from April 2020, with young people aged 18-24 particularly affected.

Domestic abuse as a cause of homelessness more than doubled in 2020/21, with national data suggesting that this may have been an effect of Covid-19. The pandemic also led to new responses to reduce the risks of homelessness. Measures to protect tenants from private sector eviction almost certainly prevented a much larger rise in this cause of homelessness. The longer-term impact on housing need and homelessness is not yet known, especially as the measures put in place during the pandemic have now ended.

The 'Everyone In' initiative was launched in 2020 to assist rough sleepers through the Covid-19 crisis, to ensure that all rough sleepers were provided with emergency accommodation. As a result, the number of single homeless people accommodated by the Council jumped from 27 in March 2020 to 61 in March 2021, including an increase in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. At the same time, the annual estimate of rough sleeping conducted in November showed a dramatic fall in people sleeping rough, from 22 in 2019 to 4 a year later in 2020.

Analysis of the most recent data on homelessness for 2021/22 shows there has been a reduction in the number of households approaching the Council for help for the first time, following year on year increases since 2017/18. In parallel with this, there has been a recent fall in the number of households owed the prevention duty. However, the main causes of homelessness and groups affected remain the same. Latest figures also show that the number of households in temporary accommodation has steadily fallen since the end of 2021, most likely as a result of actions taken forward in the homelessness strategy to intensify work to move households on to more long-term accommodation.

## **4.3 Priorities for reducing and preventing homelessness**

### **1. Maintaining high rates of prevention and relief of homelessness**

In 2020/21, 55% of households seeking assistance had their threat of homelessness resolved and 42% of people were helped to keep their existing home. In both areas, performance was better than the south-east region's overall performance. In 2021/22, prevention action was successful in 53% of cases, representing a small decline in performance, but this has picked up again in recent months. An important priority for the council is to continue to maintain high rates of homelessness prevention. Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping action plan sets out how we will do this, by working with our partners to ensure a strong focus on early intervention, targeted prevention, and improving access to support and accommodation.

### **2. Effective partnership working**

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy highlights the importance of effective partnership working. Strong local referral, signposting and support systems and a targeted approach towards groups at risk, such as care leavers, people leaving hospital and prison, lie at the heart of a successful approach to preventing homelessness. A key action in the homelessness strategy is to strengthen joint working across a wide range of agencies from specialist homelessness organisations to welfare and statutory bodies by establishing a new Homelessness Forum.

The forum was launched in January 2022 to help deliver the actions in the homelessness strategy and build an effective multi-agency response, with referral pathways and protocols in place for known at risk groups. It also has an important role in tackling the issue of 'hidden homelessness'. This term refers to the many households that are unable to access secure and settled accommodation and do not tend to approach homelessness agencies. They are often single people or couples, reliant on temporary arrangements (such as 'sofa-surfing') which have the potential to break down. Working together through the Homelessness Forum can help to identify such households and put them in touch with organisations that can provide advice and support.

### **3. Ending rough sleeping**

The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy set a target to end rough sleeping by 2027. This target has now been brought forward to 2024. Nationally, an increase in resources was made available in 2020/21 to tackle rough sleeping through the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). In Bracknell Forest, this funding has been used to deliver a range of interventions including a dedicated Rough Sleeping Team and more staff to work on preventing homelessness for both families and single people. We have successfully reduced rough sleeping to a very small number, but with 3-4 new rough sleepers identified each month, the need for short-term emergency accommodation is vital.

The Council's priority is to end involuntary rough sleeping in Bracknell Forest. To achieve this, we have developed an Ending Rough Sleeping Plan. We have undertaken a new assessment of current provision, needs and gaps in services and submitted a bid for further funding under the Rough Sleeping Initiative programme (RSI5). This will support the provision of short-term emergency accommodation, mental health support, continued outreach support and move-on and tenancy sustainment support. In addition, a separate bid has been made under the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) to increase the provision of move-on accommodation for rough sleepers and establish a housing-led support service to assist higher need service users towards independent living, following housing first principles.

#### **4. Improving housing and support for domestic abuse victims**

The new Domestic Abuse Act introduced in 2021 aimed to increase support and protection for victims of domestic abuse. It included a new duty on local authorities to ensure victims of domestic abuse are supported in safe accommodation. In Bracknell Forest we published our Safe Accommodation Strategy in January 2022, following a detailed needs assessment undertaken with the support of the Domestic Abuse Executive Group and Forum.

Our priority through the strategy is to ensure that all victims benefit from a more co-ordinated approach and can access specialist support. We are establishing a new outreach support service for victims in accommodation, providing continued support for local refuge provision, setting up a new domestic abuse specialist role within the housing service, and funding a new sanctuary scheme.

#### **5. Targeting households most at risk**

Among those most at risk of homelessness are care leavers, people recovering from drug addiction, people leaving prison and people discharged from hospital who need support.

- We will continue to review working arrangements with Children's Social Care to provide joined up housing and support for 16 and 17 year olds and will develop a joint protocol for young people leaving care.
- We will work with the Drug and Alcohol Team to understand the accommodation and support needs of those affected by drug addiction, recognising the importance given to housing in the Government's Drug Strategy, From Harm to Hope.
- We aim to improve referral pathways and earlier local joint working where mental health is a key feature and to prevent offenders becoming homeless following release. We are also exploring the possibility of a Berkshire-wide agreement with the Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust and with criminal justice agencies in Berkshire.

## **6. Reducing the use of temporary accommodation and enabling access to private rented accommodation**

The number of people in temporary accommodation increased during 2020/21, largely due to the additional numbers of single people accommodated, including rough sleepers through the Everyone In programme. By September 2021, Bracknell Forest had a total of 179 households in temporary accommodation. This represents a rate of 3.54 households per 1,000 which is significantly higher than the national average of 2.03 per 1,000. We need to reduce this to a level comparable with other local authorities.

There are significant challenges in moving people to more permanent accommodation due to affordability issues and a lack of supply. The council is aiming to expand access to good quality private rented accommodation by investing more resources in working proactively with landlords and reviewing its incentives package. This work has resulted in a steady fall in the number of households in temporary accommodation, down to 147 by March 2022. We aim to reduce this further by maintaining a focused approach to move-on and working more closely with private sector landlords through a new Landlord's Forum.

## **7. Transforming our supply of temporary accommodation to meet future needs**

It has become evident that the current stock of temporary accommodation does not adequately meet the needs of single vulnerable people, including rough sleepers, and larger families needing homes with three or more bedrooms. This has resulted in some households placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation and increased emergency use of bed and breakfast accommodation (although not for families) and other nightly-paid accommodation, which is costly for the council.

We will therefore undertake a review of our temporary accommodation stock and develop an asset and investment plan, including a programme for developing or acquiring additional forms of temporary accommodation, where current needs are not adequately met. This will help us to reduce the use of expensive nightly paid accommodation. We will also explore future funding opportunities to increase the provision of supported accommodation for vulnerable single people, including people with mental health issues, people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction and ex-offenders.

## **8. Meeting the challenges of the 'cost of living' crisis**

At the time of writing, the country faces a 'cost of living' crisis due to a combination of rising energy prices, fuel, housing and food costs. As a result, a growing number of households with financial, welfare and support needs, as well as housing needs, are approaching the council. An increasing focus of homelessness work going forward is to identify 'at risk' households and to seek to address the underlying welfare, support and financial hardship issues that tip many households into poverty and homelessness.

We will continue to use our resources to assist struggling households, including the use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to provide short-term help to households in receipt of benefits to enable them to retain or move into accommodation, and the Council Welfare Scheme to provide one-off emergency support to families in crisis. We also work with and support local organisations that are providing essential assistance with food, furniture and clothing and administer the Government's Household Support Fund, to provide supermarket and energy vouchers to low-income households. However, the resources available are not sufficient to help everyone and so we have to find ways of ensuring that help is directed towards the most at-risk households.

## Key challenges for housing need and homelessness

- Continuing to maintain and improve rates of homelessness prevention
- Providing support for vulnerable homeless households to enable them to secure and maintain accommodation
- Ensuring domestic abuse victims unable to remain in their homes have access safe and supported accommodation
- Dealing with the continuing impacts of Welfare Reform, including Local Housing Allowance rates, the benefit cap, and the spare room subsidy
- Accessing suitable long-term housing options for households in temporary accommodation, given a relatively small private rented sector
- A lack of short- and long-term supported accommodation options for single people
- The potential for an increase in evictions and financial hardship due to the cost of living crisis
- Reducing the use of costly nightly paid accommodation by addressing shortfalls in certain types and sizes of temporary accommodation

### 4.4 What we are doing to address these issues

We are taking forward the recommended actions agreed with our partners in the Homelessness Strategy action plan and an Ending Rough Sleeping Plan. Central to this is delivering an efficient, effective and customer focused homelessness service, providing high quality housing advice and assistance, and focused work with our partners to identify, prevent and reduce homelessness. Actions currently underway include:

- Working more closely with private sector landlords and lettings agencies to increase access for households in temporary accommodation
- Providing new, enhanced support services for domestic abuse victims in safe accommodation
- Acquiring additional units of temporary accommodation for single people, including accommodation suitable for wheelchair users
- Working with Children's Services to provide joined up housing and support for care leavers and 16 and 17 year olds as part of our offer for care leavers
- Targeting assistance to households at risk of financial hardship using datasets and software such as LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker) to help avert homelessness.

### What we will do in future

- Develop a co-ordinated response to increase the ability of local households to cope with financial hardship and ensure that they have the skills and support they need to successfully secure and maintain housing for themselves
- Deliver new support services for former rough sleepers, including tenancy sustainment and a mental health outreach service
- Develop a specialist supported accommodation offer for rough sleepers including emergency beds and housing-led accommodation with support
- Review the stock of temporary accommodation against future demand forecasts and reconfigure it to achieve a better fit to ensure we are providing good quality temporary accommodation for those who need it
- Develop additional temporary accommodation and move-on options for homeless people through a programme of acquisitions and small-scale one-off development
- Ensure that the Homelessness Forum is actively and regularly involved in monitoring the Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleeping Action Plan

# 5. Developing new homes: Deliver new homes in sustainable communities that meet the needs of local residents

## 5.1 Why is this important?

The Government has set out its ambition to deliver 300,000 new homes a year. Whilst the level of house building has steadily increased in recent years, new housing supply continues to be below this level. It reached a high of 243,000 new homes in 2019/20, before falling back to 216,000 new homes in 2020/21, most likely due to the Covid-19 slowdown in the construction industry in early 2020.

A shortage of suitable homes to meet a range of needs and incomes can result in higher levels of overcrowding, more young people living with their parents for longer, and increased poverty, lack of opportunity and homelessness due to the rising cost of housing. Delivering new housing is also important for the economy and labour mobility, as a shortage of housing makes it harder for businesses to recruit essential staff, and local people move away to other areas. New housing needs to be affordable, built in the right places, and supported by local services. The homes that are built in future will need to be energy efficient, well-designed, with energy saving measures such as better insulation and solar panels.

The Council has a range of responsibilities in supporting the delivery of new housing: preparing a local plan; assessing the future need for homes and identifying the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community (including affordable housing); ensuring that sufficient land is allocated to meet the future housing need; and providing clear information through the planning application process on appropriate levels, types/tenure mix of affordable homes required on new residential developments.

In undertaking these roles, we need to make sure that future residential development delivers housing that meets local needs and attracts the staff needed to maintain key services and businesses in the local area. We know that the cost of much existing and future proposed housing is already out of the reach of many households. We therefore need to increase opportunities for affordable home ownership, particularly in the areas that first-time buyers most want to live. At the same time, we must address the needs of those low-income households who rely on social housing, by enabling the delivery of more affordable homes for rent and ensuring these address current shortfalls in supply.



## 5.2 The emerging Bracknell Forest Local Plan

Bracknell Forest has prepared a new Local Plan for 2020-37, which was submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for independent examination on 20 December 2021. The Plan includes a vision, objectives, and strategy for the level and distribution of development in the Borough over the next fifteen years. The Local Plan sets out how, where and what new housing should be built in the local area to meet current needs and future requirements.

The Council's Annual Monitoring Report shows that net housing completions averaged 576 homes per annum over the ten year period from 2011/12 to 2020/21. An increase in this level of housing delivery will be needed to meet the future estimated growth in households.

Over the last three years, net housing completions have been well above this average.

Table 3. Net housing completions in Bracknell Forest

Year	Net housing completions
2019/20	1614
2020/21	304
2021/22	289

## 5.3 Bracknell Forest Housing Needs Assessment 2021

The Council's Housing Needs Assessment (HNA)<sup>5</sup> was prepared in March 2021 by Icen Projects to support the development of the draft Local Plan. The Housing Needs Assessment estimates that there is a significant need for affordable housing and that housing specifically for older people will be needed to meet the future growth in the older population. Some of the key findings are summarised below.

### Key findings of the Housing Needs Assessment

- There is an estimated total need for 614 new homes per year up to 2037 to accommodate the future growth in households
- The assessed net need for affordable housing is 338 affordable homes each year up to 2037, split 232 affordable rented homes and 106 affordable home ownership
- Affordable housing for rent should be provided in a 50/50 split between social rented and affordable rented homes
- 70% of the need for new market homes is for larger three and four bedroom properties; the need for larger affordable rent dwellings is less, at 30-40%
- The greatest need for affordable home ownership is one and two bedroom properties with shared ownership considered to be the most appropriate product
- There is a significant need for specialist housing to meet the future growth in older people

<sup>5</sup> <https://consult.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/file/5819854>

## **5.4 Priorities for delivering new homes**

### **Increasing housing supply to meet future housing growth**

In order to deliver the new homes that are needed, the Local Plan has identified future sites to come forward for housing development. The majority of residential development opportunities in the borough will involve greenfield land, with the balance on previously developed sites, including a number of town centre sites in Bracknell and some urban extensions to the existing defined settlements of Bracknell, Sandhurst and Crowthorne.

### **Ensuring good quality homes and creating sustainable communities**

The Council is committed to securing high standards of design on new residential developments to create attractive, safe and inclusive places, that facilitate ease of movement and access, and meet the needs of different groups. We will ensure that larger development sites provide adequate local facilities including neighbourhood centres, schools and local open space. To promote good mental health and wellbeing, access to green spaces, noise insulation and private amenity space are all important.

The Council wishes to see new residential developments coming forward quickly and will encourage developers to engage with the planning service at an early stage to agree design principles and, on larger, more complex, sites, an area masterplan, prior to the submission of a planning application. A partnership approach based on a shared understanding and vision for the proposed development will enable sites to come forward more quickly. New modern methods of construction, such as part off-site built modular homes, are encouraged where they can assist in speeding up housing delivery.

The Council is concerned about the standard and quality of some office to residential conversions. Potential issues can include damp, inadequate noise insulation, small room sizes, lack of daylight and inadequate ventilation. Where conversions to residential use are proposed we want to work with developers at the earliest stages to ensure that these homes will be safe and fit for purpose.

### **Working towards net carbon zero**

All major new build developments must include measures to help communities to minimise, mitigate and adapt to climate change. As far as possible, they should achieve net zero carbon for regulated emissions, by using renewable and low carbon technologies and sustainable construction. We will encourage the use of solar PV cells and/or ground source heat pumps, along with a managed reduction in car parking spaces in favour of cycle parking, public transport and car sharing schemes, as the best means of achieving our target to reduce carbon emissions. We will develop further policy on climate change to inform our planning policies going forward.

### **Increasing the supply of affordable homes**

The Council has an important role in ensuring the provision of affordable homes, both through its planning policies and through enabling work with Registered Providers and developers to deliver additional affordable housing. Over the last 3 years we have supported the development of 373 new affordable homes, of which 64% were for affordable rent and 36% were for shared ownership. This is an average of 124 affordable homes per year. Most of these homes have been delivered through s106 Planning agreements on new residential developments.

Table 4. Affordable homes completions in Bracknell Forest

Year	All affordable homes	Homes for AHO	Homes for rent
2019/20	149	43	106
2020/21	107	54	53
2021/22	117	37	80

Whilst the Council owns and manages a small portfolio of homes used as temporary accommodation, it does not itself develop new affordable housing. Instead, its role is to set out the priority needs for affordable housing and to work with Registered Providers to deliver new homes that responds to these needs. All new affordable rented homes are made available to households on the Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) My Choice housing register, through nomination agreements and local lettings plans. New shared ownership homes are prioritised for local buyers for the first 3 months of marketing.

The Housing Needs Assessment estimates a net need for 232 affordable rented homes and 106 affordable home ownership homes per year up to 2037 (total 338), which takes account of current developments in the pipeline. Most of the need for affordable home ownership homes is in the Bracknell town area rather than the northern and southern areas of the borough. The need for affordable homes for rent is also higher in the town centre but is more evenly spread across the borough.

Based on current projections, 435 new affordable homes are forecast to be built in the borough over the next three to four years. This is clearly below the estimated annual need of 338 affordable homes. In practice, the delivery of affordable housing is limited to what is financially viable on individual developments, and certain sites (for example, developments of less than ten dwellings and those brought forward through permitted development rights) are excluded from affordable housing obligations. One of the key priorities of the Council is to achieve an uplift in affordable housing completions through the following actions:

- Strengthening the council’s housing enabling function to ensure that the delivery of affordable homes through the planning system is maximised and is of the right type.
- Creating opportunities for Registered Providers to work with the council to invest and build homes that meet the priority need for housing where opportunities arise on surplus council-owned land.
- Supporting proposals that will provide additional affordable housing, including the use of grant funding.

### **Affordability and affordable rented homes**

The Housing Needs Assessment highlights a disparity between social rent levels in the borough and affordable rents at up to 80% of market rents, with affordable rents likely to be unaffordable for some low-income households. It therefore recommends that ‘a 50/50 split of rented affordable housing between social rent and affordable rented homes is sought through policy’. Larger affordable rented units should be prioritised for social rent given the considerable difference between social rents and affordable rents for larger properties.

The Submitted Local Plan proposes the following mix of affordable housing on residential development sites where the affordable housing policy applies:

- 69% to be provided as affordable homes for rent split 50% for social rent and 50% for affordable rent (up to 80% of the market rent)
- 31% for affordable home ownership

In order to ensure the best outcome on each site, we will work closely with registered providers and developers to align affordable housing proposals to local needs, agree an appropriate distribution of the social and affordable rented homes, and formulate an agreed local lettings plan for each site. We will also produce and update guidance for developers setting out the affordable housing needs and priorities of the Borough, drawing on evidence from the housing register and other sources.

## Meeting the needs of young households and first-time buyers

Across the south-east of England, including Bracknell Forest, affordability is a critical issue affecting the housing market. Rising house prices are making home ownership more and more challenging for local households. The average house price for properties sold in Bracknell Forest in the 12 months up to September 2022 was over £400,000. The cost of entry-level homes is nearly ten times more than lower quartile earnings. The proportion of income needed to buy a house has almost doubled for those in the lower quartile of earnings in Bracknell Forest over the last 20 years. Many local people are now unable to afford to buy on the open market, as first-time buyers.

For younger households the affordability ratio is even higher, pointing to significant barriers to buying a home. The Help-to-Buy Equity Loan Scheme has enabled some younger households to buy a home with a reduced mortgage. Over the period between April 2013 and June 2019, 687 households were helped to buy a home in the Borough. However, this scheme is coming to an end in March 2023. The majority of young people looking to move out of the family home will be unable to afford to buy a home and their main option will be private rented accommodation, with houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) offering the most affordable accommodation.

New affordable home ownership housing can provide an opportunity for those households with a sufficient income to purchase a home, often at a lower monthly cost than private renting. The affordability analysis in the Housing Needs Assessment concludes that shared ownership is the most appropriate and affordable product. Equity shares of 30%-35% and a focus on delivering mainly smaller properties will help to ensure affordability in relation to local incomes. We will therefore continue to support shared ownership housing, focusing in particular on one and two bedroom properties, to provide an affordable option for local first-time buyers.

## Developing the right type and size of homes

We need to ensure that we build the right type and size of affordable homes. Indicative targets for different sizes of properties by tenure across the borough have been provided in the Housing Needs Assessment, for the period up to 2037, as shown below.

Table 5. Property sizes required by tenure

Tenure	1 bedroom	2 bedroom	3 bedroom	4 bedroom
Market	5%	25%	45%	25%
Affordable Rent	30-35%	30-35%	20-25%	10-15%
Affordable Home Ownership	25%	40%	25%	10%

Table 5 shows that 30-40% of the need for affordable homes for rent is for three and four properties and 70% of the need for affordable home ownership is for one and two bedroom homes.

Additional information from the housing register shows the number of households with an assessed housing need waiting for social housing (i.e. social and affordable rented properties). In March 2022, there were 1,689 households on the housing register. In 2021/22, a total of 227 general needs properties and 67 sheltered properties became available to let. It is clear that the level of demand for social housing properties far outstrips the supply of homes becoming available.

Table 6 shows the property sizes required by households on the Housing Register. Although the greatest need overall is for one bedroom homes, a large number of the 768 households seeking these properties are in the lowest priority bands and do not have a high assessed housing need. 641 households are waiting for larger homes of three or more bedrooms, accounting for nearly 40% of those on the housing register; over half of these households having a high assessed housing need.

Table 6. Demand on the housing register by band and property size (March 2022)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	All
Band A	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Band B	152	27	88	113	45	28	453
Band C	303	211	270	76	9	3	872
Band D	313	41	8	1	0	0	363
Total	<b>768</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>1689</b>
%	45%	17%	22%	11%	3%	2%	

Further analysis shows that there is significant imbalance between the demand for and supply of larger homes for affordable rent, which results in much longer rehousing times for larger homes compared to smaller property sizes. Some key findings are:

- In 2020/21 there were 63 families waiting for every 4 bedroom property let compared to 6 households for every one bedroom property let.
- 90% of new affordable rented homes delivered in the last four years were 1 and 2 bed properties rather than 3 and 4 bed properties (see table 7).
- Households needing larger affordable rented properties are waiting 3-4 times longer than other households with the average wait for a four bedroom property over 6 years, compared to 1-2 years for a smaller property.
- Households waiting for larger homes typically have a higher assessed housing need than those waiting for smaller properties.
- Many of those affected are living in unsatisfactory, overcrowded, conditions with negative impacts on their children’s welfare, health, and education.

Table 7. Delivery of affordable homes for rent by property size

Year	Homes for rent	One bed	Two bed	Three bed	Four bed
2018/19	45	18	24	3	0
2019/20	106	41	53	12	0
2020/21	53	17	32	4	0
2021/22	80	23	48	8	1

Addressing the shortage of larger affordable rented homes, particularly 4 bedroom homes, is a high priority for the Council over the next five years. The evidence in this housing strategy is that targets for larger affordable rented properties over the next five years need to be at least at the upper end of the ranges shown in the housing needs assessment table. We propose that minimum targets of 25% for three beds and 15% for four beds should be set. These targets are necessary to overturn a significant under-delivery of new larger homes in recent years.

For affordable home ownership, it is proposed that the provision of larger homes is reduced to below the indicative targets in the Housing Need Assessment over the next five years. Increasing delivery of smaller shared ownership homes will give more younger, first-time buyer households in private rented accommodation the opportunity to move and recognises the current affordability constraints around larger properties.

This housing strategy therefore proposes the following indicative housing mix targets for affordable housing over the next five years.

Tenure	1 bedroom	2 bedroom	3 bedroom	4 bedroom
Affordable Rent	30%	30%	25%	15%
Affordable Home Ownership	30%	50%	15%	5%

The capacity to achieve these targets will be limited on certain sites. For example, future development in and around Bracknell Town Centre is likely to focus on high-density mixed-use schemes and deliver mainly smaller flatted dwellings, rather than family homes. Therefore, it is critical that the provision of larger homes for affordable rent is maximised on sites that offer the greatest scope to meet the need for family sized houses, which will generally be suburban and greenfield sites. This means that on sites where the market homes include larger family dwellings, the affordable rented homes should be of a similar size and type, and not mainly smaller dwellings.

In order to deliver the overall housing mix targets for affordable housing and to reverse the historical concentration on smaller one and two bedroom homes for affordable rent, we will:

- Seek to maximise the provision of three and four bedroom properties for affordable rent on appropriate sites, above the borough-wide housing mix targets
- Robustly apply the requirement for affordable housing to be of a similar type and size to the market sale dwellings on developments proposing large numbers of family homes, and resist proposals for smaller, flatted affordable dwellings on such sites
- Prioritise larger affordable homes for social rent, or affordable rents that are well below 80% of the market rent, so they are affordable to low income households

We recognise that there are challenges in delivering the level and types of affordable housing that

are most needed. High land values limit the opportunities for Registered Providers to develop sites for affordable housing to meet local housing needs. Development costs have risen sharply as a result of shortages of materials and labour, affecting the viability of developments. Despite these factors, we must make it a priority to deliver an increased number of larger affordable rented homes over the next five years.

### **Strengthening the housing enabling role**

As the Council does not itself develop new affordable homes it is essential that we work effectively with our partners to deliver the types of housing that are most needed. We will therefore:

- Strengthen our relationships with Registered Providers (RPs) to influence the provision of S106 affordable housing on new developments and support RP led development proposals
- Ensure that developers and house-builders provide onsite affordable housing that aligns to local needs
- Collaborate with Homes England on proposals for additional affordable housing delivered on top of planning requirements
- Provide clear guidance on the priorities for affordable housing, including preparing a new housing Supplementary Planning Document, and publishing an annual update on housing needs based on the latest available evidence

### **Addressing the need for adaptable dwellings**

Accessible and adaptable dwellings can meet the housing needs of a wide range of social groups, including older people, some disabled people, and non-disabled people including families with children. They are important in enabling older people to remain living in their homes for longer, without the need for specialist accommodation.

The Bracknell Forest Housing Needs Assessment provides evidence on the need for accessible and adaptable dwellings and wheelchair user dwellings in response to the projected change in the age profile of the Borough. It demonstrates that there will be a growth in the number of people aged over 65 and a corresponding increase in the number of people with a limiting long-term health problem or disability. The Housing Needs Assessment concludes that the need for wheelchair user dwellings equates to about 5% of the total housing need after applying national data to the demographic projections.

The emerging Local Plan sets out policies requiring the provision of accessible homes, including homes adapted for wheelchair users and for all homes as far as possible to meet minimum accessibility standards by having step-free access and features to make homes more easily adaptable over time. The priority for the housing strategy is to ensure that future development provides a continued supply of accessible and adapted properties for affordable and social rent that responds to identified need. The most recent evidence shows that about 50% of this need is for one bed adapted properties. However, the delivery of new wheelchair adapted homes in recent years has focused almost exclusively on one bed properties, resulting in an insufficient supply of two and three bed wheelchair accessible homes to meet the needs of families and people with carers. In future, we aim to give greater priority to delivering two and three bedroom adapted properties.

## **Meeting the need for other types of housing – self-build, gypsies and travellers, older people.**

Self-build and custom-build homes have an important role to play in the delivery of and diversity of housing. Under the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, the Council has a duty to keep and publicise a self-build and custom housebuilding register. As of April 2022, 105 individuals and one association had registered an interest. We support self-build and custom housebuilding by:

- developing planning policies which require and support plots to be provided for self-build and custom housebuilding
- promoting and encouraging submissions of land which are suitable for self-build and custom housebuilding through the Call for Sites process
- using local authority-owned land if available and suitable for self-build and custom housebuilding and marketing it to those on the register
- working with custom build developers to maximise opportunities for self-build and custom housebuilding

The Council completed a new Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Show-person Accommodation Assessment in March 2022<sup>6</sup>. The assessment concludes that a total of 8 new pitches are required up to 2037, and provision has been made for these through the site allocations process. There is also a need to accommodate 5 additional Travelling Show-person plots which we will seek to meet through the intensification of Travelling Show-person plots at Hazelwood Lane and by bringing vacant plots back into use.

### **Key challenges in developing new homes**

- Delivering a sufficient number of new homes to meet future housing growth targets in a sustainable way
- Achieving an increase in new affordable homes to meet a range of needs
- Meeting the critical shortage of larger family homes for social and affordable rent which is resulting in long waits in overcrowded accommodation
- Addressing the lack of affordability of housing in the local area through affordable home ownership options that respond to local need and increasing the provision of affordable homes for social rent
- Meeting targets for reducing carbon emissions in new homes
- Responding to the demand for specialist forms of accommodation, including an additional gypsy and traveller site and support for custom and self-build homes

<sup>6</sup> <https://consult.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/file/5994996>



## 5.5 What we are doing to address these issues

The emerging Bracknell Forest Local Plan seeks to promote sustainable and inclusive housing growth to meet future needs through planning for the right number and types of new homes in the right places. In addition to this, we are bringing forward a number of actions to deliver new homes that meet our priority needs by:

- Preparing a new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which will provide detailed information on how affordable housing requirements will be applied under the new Local Plan
- Promoting shared ownership as the most affordable option for affordable home ownership and ensuring that these homes are offered to local residents first
- Producing regularly updated information for developers and registered providers on the priority needs for affordable housing
- Working with the Council's Joint Venture partner on opportunities to develop new, good quality housing on council owned land
- Strengthening the housing enabling function to ensure planning decisions are informed by an up to date understanding of local housing needs and priorities

### What we will do in future

- Maximise the number of affordable homes provided on new developments by ensuring a robust approach to planning viability and challenging developers who do not deliver affordable housing policy compliant schemes
- Develop ongoing dialogue with Registered Providers to enable them to understand the Council's priorities and develop proposals using available funding programmes
- Work with planning colleagues, developers and partners to ensure that the delivery of affordable housing reflects the types, tenures and sizes most needed
- Promote opportunities for self-build and custom build development
- Ensure that the Council makes use of its wider place shaping powers and its land ownerships and resources to deliver housing growth and meet local housing needs
- Ensure a continued supply of accessible and adaptable homes with a greater emphasis on two and three bedroom properties to meet the needs of applicants on the housing register
- Regularly update and publish data on priority needs for affordable housing, to include property sizes and types, and the need for wheelchair adapted homes.
- Work with developers to ensure new homes have reduced carbon emissions and high levels of thermal efficiency

# 6. Existing homes: Make the best use of existing homes and improve housing quality

## 6.1 Why is this important?

Councils have an important role to play in ensuring the best use of the existing housing stock as well as maintaining and improving housing conditions in their local area. To deal with this councils have various enforcement powers that they can employ where landlords fail to meet current standards. These apply not only to private rented accommodation, but also owner-occupied housing and Registered Provider housing.

The private rented sector, although relatively small, plays an important role in the housing market in Bracknell Forest. 12.5% of dwellings are rented privately compared to a national average of 16.8%. Much of this accommodation is unaffordable for households on low incomes, including those in receipt of welfare support. The ONS reports that across the UK, rents increased by 13.9% between January 2015 and June 2022 (Index of private rental housing prices UK. June 2022). Applied to Bracknell Forest, this would represent an increase of £120 per month in the median monthly rent. In addition, cost of living increases are eroding the ability of households to meet their housing costs. It is therefore important that we engage with and sustain this sector as an accessible and affordable housing option in the borough.

The condition and standard of housing in the private rented sector, including houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), has an important bearing on the health, safety and well-being of tenants. The majority of landlords in the private rented sector provide decent and well managed accommodation, but there are a small number of rogue landlords who flout their legal obligations and rent out substandard accommodation, frequently to vulnerable tenants. We are committed to improving housing conditions in the private rented sector by tackling non-compliance and investigating complaints from tenants about poor quality or overcrowded living conditions and, if necessary, by taking legal enforcement action.

In the social housing sector, demand is increasing, but with fewer households moving out of existing social rented homes, the number of homes becoming available to let is shrinking. It is therefore important to manage and prioritise how social housing is used through the Council's allocations policy. It is also important that we work with social housing providers to ensure that housing standards are improved, that buildings and fire safety requirements are met, and tenants' voices are heard. New proposed legislation seeks to improve social tenants' right to redress where their housing conditions are unacceptable and to ensure timely repairs.

Across all housing sectors, there is a growing awareness of the importance of making homes as energy efficient as possible, not least because as energy prices have rapidly risen, fuel poverty is affecting more and more households. Whilst new homes will have to achieve higher levels of energy efficiency working towards net zero carbon targets, it is important to promote opportunities to improve the energy efficiency rating of existing homes.

## 6.2 Private sector housing

The Council's Public Protection Partnership (PPP) service is a shared service with West Berkshire Council covering environmental health, licensing and trading standards and its role is to support safe and healthy neighbourhoods and homes. The Private Sector Housing Policy 2020-2022 sets out the broad objectives of the service and an Environmental Health Housing Policy 2022-2025 is currently in draft. The overarching aim is to protect residents from poor housing conditions and standards of management

Local Authorities are required to review the housing conditions in their area and identify where action is necessary under various Housing Acts. This includes:

- Regulating standards of repair, amenity and safety in the private rented sector and dealing with housing health and safety hazards
- Carrying out investigations relating to vacant dwellings and dealing with issues they present.
- Regulating standards of management, repair, amenity and safety in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and administering the Council's HMO mandatory licensing scheme
- Licensing of caravan sites and park home sites
- Investigating and taking enforcement action where necessary across all housing sectors

The UK has a huge number of 'non-decent homes' in the private sector which do not meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS). The English Household Survey in 2020 found that 21 per cent of private rented sector homes are non-decent, which is much higher than the figure for social rented homes. Currently only social housing landlords are bound by the Decent Homes Standard.

In Bracknell Forest, the Council's PPP service focuses on investigating complaints of poor or hazardous housing conditions, unsatisfactory standards of repair and safety, and poor management standards. In 2021/22 action was taken to tackle 7 private rented sector dwellings found to have category 1 hazards. Category 1 hazards are those where the most serious potential for harm is identified, which could relate to unsanitary conditions, the dangerous presence of carbon monoxide or asbestos, or the potential for accidents and falls. The low number indicates that most housing is free of serious hazards and dangers.

In 2021, there were 115 long-term vacant properties recorded in Bracknell Forest (compared to 366 in 2020 and 278 in 2019). The Council does not have the capacity to investigate all of these empty properties, but it will respond to reports of long-term empty properties, particularly where these are causing a nuisance and provide owners with advice and assistance. There are legislative powers that the Council can use if necessary.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) play an important role in meeting the housing needs of many single and young people. The Council wishes to encourage and support the creation of a high quality, well-managed and regulated, HMO sector that delivers relatively affordable accommodation. The HMO Mandatory Licensing Scheme, which the Council operates in accordance with the Government's reform of the licensing regime in 2018, applies only to 'larger' HMOs, defined as a property rented out to 5 or more people from different households. In March 2022, mandatory HMO licences had been issued to 135 HMOs out of an estimated total of 149 that met the criteria for licencing. The total number of HMOs, defined as properties rented out by at least 3 people not from one household and sharing facilities, is estimated to be in the region of 500 (LAHS 2021/22). This means that a large number of HMOs are not subject to licensing. The Council is committed to developing improved intelligence in this area in order to identify poor standards and practices among these properties.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill 2022 proposes new policy interventions to improve the standard of homes, including: a target to halve the number of non-decent homes by 2030, extending the Decent Homes Standard to the Private Rented Sector and establishing a Private

Landlord Ombudsman who would seek redress and dispute resolution for tenants regarding housing standards and repairs. It also pledges to crack down on 'rogue landlords' and to introduce a national landlord register.

It is unclear what the proposed introduction of the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector will include and whether it will mean that in addition to current responsibilities for identifying Category 1 hazards in premises, the Council will also need to consider other measures including reasonable repair, reasonably modern facilities, reasonable degree of thermal comfort. Without additional resources, the Council will find it a challenge to effectively enforce the Decent Homes Standard in the private rented sector.

The new Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 respond to findings and recommendations made in the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry. From January 2023 there will be a legal requirement for building owners or managers of multi-occupied residential buildings with common parts to implement fire safety measures and provide fire rescue information. We are already responding to this by building effective working relationships with key agencies, including Thames Valley Police, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, local housing providers, and other local authorities.

There are a number of areas where we are looking to take a more pro-active approach to raise housing standards, for example by establishing a Landlord Forum to improve communication with landlords and lettings agencies. A joint initiative is underway with Building Control and the Fire Service to ensure commercial to residential conversions are safe and fit for purpose, from the planning stage through to responding to complaints on completed developments. We are also giving high priority to tackling damp and mould issues given their negative impact on health by making information widely available and encouraging residents to report issues, treating reports as a priority and conducting full housing, health and safety assessments and proactively working with social housing landlords and health services to ensure joined up action.

**The following future actions have been identified for this Housing Strategy:**

- Undertake a detailed private sector housing condition survey to provide a focus for more targeted action and assistance
- Improve intelligence on sub-standard properties and unauthorised HMOs
- Investigate the feasibility of implementing a Landlord Accreditation Scheme
- Respond to new duties and requirements resulting from the Fire Safety Regulations and Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

### **6.3 Climate change and fuel poverty**

Bracknell Forest is committed to tackling climate change through its work to achieve improvements in domestic energy efficiency in the Borough. As a result, Bracknell Forest scores well for the number of well-insulated homes, with only 6% of homes having a low energy rating (E, F or G), and only 1.2% of all homes having no central heating, much lower than the national average of 2.7%. The council has been commended in the local authority award category for delivering energy efficiency improvements to its residents, focusing on the most vulnerable in the community. This work was further recognised at both the National and the Regional Energy Efficiency awards for Local Authority of the year reflecting our role in improving domestic energy standards across the borough.

As an authority we hold energy efficiency data on 98% of all homes in the borough. From this data we know we have attained an average Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) band rating of 'C', which makes us one of the first local authorities in England to achieve this. SAP ratings are used to assess and compare the energy and environmental performance of dwellings, with A being the

most energy efficient; the government has set a target for all households to achieve a 'C' rating by 2035. In addition, the government has introduced a requirement for all rental properties to achieve SAP band C by 31 Dec 2030. This will be challenging as the capacity and cost of retrofitting are likely to pose significant barriers to achieving these targets.

There are various national funding schemes that can provide home insulation and renewable energy solutions. For example, we were able to retrofit 99 of the least energy efficient homes in 2020/21 through Green Homes grant made available to local authorities. Eligibility for grant funding is limited however and schemes generally target those persons who are vulnerable to the cold or are living in fuel poverty. In addition, those living in non-standard and poorly insulated homes such as park homes, properties built over shops and garages, blocks of flats, solid walled properties and mixed build constructions face the highest costs but are ineligible for grant funding. This means many residents would have to contribute to or fully fund the costs of works, and with the cost of home improvement works increasing due to stricter quality standards, this will be unaffordable for many.

Rapidly rising energy costs mean that more and more residents are facing fuel poverty in the local area. Our energy efficiency database enables us to target the least energy efficient properties and, as noted above, we can support residents that are eligible to bid for local and national funding schemes. We are also collaborating with Silva Homes to keep energy efficiency data updated on their entire stock and to support their bids to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

However, we recognise that further work is needed to tackle fuel poverty and have set the following priorities:

- Deliver a co-ordinated approach across the council to better identify households living in fuel poverty
- Improve our knowledge of the energy efficiency status of households within the borough and map areas with a higher proportion of energy inefficient homes
- Help as many households as possible to achieve 'C' band SAP rating

## 6.4 Social housing

The Council no longer owns or manages its own council housing, following a large-scale voluntary transfer of council-owned housing to Bracknell Forest Homes in 2008, which later became Silva Homes<sup>7</sup>. All social housing in the borough is provided by Registered Providers of Social Housing (RPs) which must be registered with the Regulator of Social Housing. In March 2020, there were 7,348 social and affordable rented homes managed by 18 registered providers in the borough, the majority owned by Silva Homes.

The Council is committed to ensuring the effective use of the available social housing stock in the borough. It maintains a housing register which enables people to apply for social housing in the local area (or to transfer from an existing social housing property), providing they meet certain eligibility criteria and are in housing need. As the Council does not own any social housing itself, it relies on making nominations to Registered Providers to enable households on the housing register to access social housing.

Local authorities are required to publish a housing allocation scheme which sets out how social housing in their area will be allocated, which households qualify, and how different levels of need and priority are assessed, whilst giving "reasonable preference" to certain categories of applicant (Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996). Nominations by local authorities to stock owned by Registered Providers are allocated within the same legal framework.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.silvahomes.co.uk/>

A review of the current housing allocations scheme is underway which aims to simplify and clarify the policy and ensure that local households in greatest need are prioritised. We are proposing to make changes to the current banding system and to amend the qualification rules that determine when an applicant can join the Housing Register, e.g. by reviewing residency requirements, income and financial limits and home ownership rules. We will be carrying out a full public consultation prior to making any changes to the policy.

Making the most effective use of the existing stock of social housing in the depends on:

- minimising void periods between lettings and ensuring the efficient operation of the Bracknell Forest Council My Choice lettings system
- maximising nominations to properties becoming available to let within RPs' social housing stock for households in greatest need on the housing register
- reducing under-occupation of social housing properties by providing incentives, support and assistance to enable households to downsize to smaller properties

The Government has set proposals to increase consumer rights in the social housing sector in its Social Housing White Paper, in October 2020. The Social Housing Regulation Bill, published in June 2022, proposes giving stronger powers to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) to enforce housing standards and repairs where social landlords are under-performing. The bill responds to some well-publicised failures in the social housing sector to address tenants' concerns about poor housing conditions.

It is the role of the Regulator, rather than the local authority, to monitor the performance of local RPs. However, the Council is keen to ensure that Registered Providers maintain and improve the condition of their housing stock and that all social housing stock meets the Decent Homes Standard. Decent Homes are defined as being free of Category 1 hazards, in a reasonable state of repair, with reasonably modern facilities and services, and providing a reasonable degree of thermal comfort. A review of registered providers' social housing was undertaken by the Council in 2021, which confirmed that the vast majority of homes meet the decent homes standard. For Silva Homes, 99% of their stock achieves decent homes.

The Council also has a responsibility for enforcing health and safety standards with RPs and investigating any complaints regarding housing standards. Where these arise, they mainly involve unsatisfactory works from contractors or delays in repairs. In Bracknell Forest, these are usually resolved quickly and successfully as a result of our constructive relationships with RPs.

The Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017, which tragically resulted in the deaths of 72 people, exposed a range of issues with social housing, due to dangerous cladding systems and other defects such as combustible balconies and missing cavity barriers. This has provided an impetus for change, with health and safety becoming one of the top priorities for social housing providers. RPs have undertaken fire risk assessments on all their stock to identify any remedial and fire stopping works needed, including compartmentation works, replacement fire doors and installation of sprinkler systems. Silva Homes, for example, has recently completed remediation works at the Point Royal flats – the tallest residential building in Bracknell.

## Key challenges for improving and making best use of the existing stock

- Responding to new housing needs and changes to buildings regulations to improve housing conditions, standards of management, fire safety and carbon emissions.
- Working with private sector landlords to ensure a stock of good quality, affordable, accommodation for local households.
- Improving energy efficiency, especially in older properties, to help reduce energy costs and tackle fuel poverty
- Incentivising existing social tenants who are under-occupying to downsize to free up larger properties
- Addressing concerns about damp and mould, inadequate external wall insulation / cladding and fire safety systems in social and private housing, including office to residential conversions

## 6.5 What we are doing to address these issues

The Council recognises the important role that the private rented sector plays in Bracknell Forest in meeting housing demand. We are working with the sector to provide more housing options for residents and encourage improvements to the condition of dwellings. As one of the most common causes of homelessness is the ending of assured shorthold tenancies, we are working with landlords to reduce this.

Similarly, we are working closely with our social housing partners to ensure that households in greatest need benefit from increased access to good quality, well managed and maintained, affordable housing. Lastly, with fuel poverty becoming a significant issue for many households, worsened by living in homes with poor energy efficiency, we are developing a co-ordinated approach to target the most vulnerable households. The range of actions already underway include:

- Improving communication with private rented sector landlords and letting agencies through the Landlords Forum
- Identifying households in the least energy efficient housing and supporting them to access grant funding and other assistance
- Developing a new allocations policy to ensure that the limited social housing becoming available to let is allocated to those with the highest needs
- Increasing access to the private rented sector through incentives and building relationships with landlords
- Surveying the council's temporary accommodation to identify the need for works to address damp and mould, fuel economy and insulation

## What the council will do in future

- Increase the use of social media to engage private sector landlords
- Undertake further investigation and intelligence gathering to target HMOs and other properties that fall below housing standards
- Develop an empty homes policy to bring long-term vacant homes back into use
- Commission a new private sector housing condition survey so that we can pro-actively identify where to focus our resources
- Develop proactive relationships and work collaboratively with Registered Providers to improve standards in social housing
- Help the most vulnerable and provide fuel poverty advice and funding to improve the condition and the energy efficiency of their homes
- Develop collaborative and innovative approaches to under-occupation with Silva Homes and other RPs, to provide tailored packages of assistance including help with moving, decoration, carpets and furniture, etc, to release larger social homes



# 7. People with care and support needs: Provide a range of housing options for people with care and support needs

## 7.1 Why is this important?

In line with the general population, people in Bracknell Forest are living longer and it is estimated that by 2037, there will be an increase of 50% in the over-65 household population and a 65% increase in the over-75 household population. An increase in the ageing population will generate increased needs in terms of dementia, frailty, and disability and a greater demand for health, care and support services. It is also evident that learning disability needs are changing, with an ageing population having more physical disabilities and more challenging needs and behaviour.

These trends bring increased challenges for social care and health services in future. We will need to form new partnerships and work coherently to ensure that the current and future needs of people eligible for services are met, providing people with greater choice and access to high quality accommodation. The importance of this is underlined by the 2021 Health and Social Care Integration White Paper which promotes greater collaboration across providers and commissioners of NHS services, local authorities, independent providers, voluntary sector organisations and community representatives.

We want to enable people with care and support needs in Bracknell Forest to live as independently as possible in their own homes for as long as possible, with person-centred, individual support packages that focus on maintaining independence and making best use of community assets. This means promoting forms of housing that are most able to provide independent living opportunities for our ageing and vulnerable population.

For those with a disability, living in housing which is unsuitable can have a severe impact on their health and wellbeing. The council can assist residents who require various aids and adaptations to enable them to remain living their own homes through its Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) programme<sup>8</sup>. This is important in enabling people to continue living independently in their own homes and reducing demands on residential care, hospitals and health settings.

For people who are no longer able to remain living in their own home, we need to ensure that a range of accommodation options with different care and support models are available. Where there are gaps or shortages in provision, we need to develop the market to meet these needs, including developing purpose-built accommodation with care and support, working in partnership with health and social care providers.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.silvahomes.co.uk/>

Work on a Care and Accommodation Strategy has commenced to assess the priorities for care and accommodation in future. The strategy covers older people and working age adults with care and support needs, including people with learning disabilities, people with mental health needs and people with physical and sensory needs. It draws on the available evidence and data on current levels of need and provision and make estimates of future needs based on population growth and changing patterns of need and provision.

For children and young people, the Sufficiency Plan for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2020-2023 sets out the local authority's plans to ensure access to accommodation and support across a range of needs. It includes a summary of the changing needs profile, and demand for placements and a high level action plan which outlines future priorities.

## 7.2 Older people

The substantial growth in the population of older persons that is forecast, including the number of people with dementia and limited mobility, will create additional demand for housing for older people. Many older households will continue to live in mainstream housing but given the associated increases in those with a disability, it is appropriate for new housing to be delivered to meet accessible and adaptable home standards where possible. Some older households, particularly those aged over 75, will require specialist housing provision.

An initial review for the Care and Accommodation Strategy looked at the level of need for different types of specialised housing and accommodation for older people. It identified 11 residential and nursing care homes in Bracknell Forest for older people providing a total of 397 beds which offer a mixture of residential and nursing care placements. Currently 202 residential and nursing care placements are funded by the Council for older people. The average number of admissions per year into residential or nursing homes is 101.

As of June 2021, 70 of these funded placements were becoming more complex in need. There is also increasing demand for care in relation to dementia and challenging behaviour. To address this need, we have recently developed a new dementia nursing service at Heathlands which opened in April 2022. This provides 46 nursing beds in total and will meet some of the future need; the council has a block contract for 36 of these beds and 10 are available to be purchased directly by the private market.

### Housing LIN Review 2021 Summary Needs Analysis

In March 2021, Bracknell Forest Council commissioned the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (Housing LIN)<sup>9</sup> to undertake a technical review of the level of need for different types of specialised housing and accommodation for older people. A summary of the net need for each accommodation type is set out below, along with the estimated need remaining to be met, which takes account of known developments in the pipeline.

<sup>9</sup> <https://consult.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/file/5912800>

Table 8. Estimated need for older person's housing

Housing and accommodation type	Estimated net need (2020-37)	Estimated balance remaining to be met (2020-37)
<b>Housing with support – sheltered/retirement housing</b>	580 units (175 rent/405 leasehold) of which 50% of the need can be met in mainstream housing, leaving 290 units needed in specialist older people accommodation	230 units in specialist older person's accommodation, (assuming 50% of the need can be met in mainstream housing), and allowing for known developments in the pipeline*. (175 rent/345 leasehold)
<b>Housing with care - Extra care</b>	260 units (130 rent/130 leasehold)	260 units (130 rent/130 leasehold)
<b>Housing with care - Residential care homes</b>	100 residential bedspaces	0 bedspaces (allowing for known developments in the pipeline)
<b>Housing with care - Nursing care homes</b>	210 nursing bedspaces	185 bedspaces (allowing for known developments in the pipeline)

\* With an existing planning permission or accepted in principle

The review found that allowing for developments already in the pipeline, the largest area of unmet need relates to extra-care housing. In particular, there is a lack of extra-care provision available at affordable rent levels in the Bracknell Forest area, which represents a significant gap in provision. There is also a need for housing with support and nursing care homes. The analysis suggests there is little additional need for residential care provision. The priority for the council is to encourage the development of extra care housing which enables people to live as independently as possible.

The draft Local Plan seeks to help meet the need for older person's accommodation by requiring strategic sites, where suitable environments can be created, to contribute towards a range of housing options for older people, and by supporting proposals for older people's housing on appropriately located 'windfall' sites. There may also be opportunities to develop specialist older people's accommodation in future on the council's own land as this comes forward for development. Proposals should address the need for care and support provision for people who do not own their own property and cannot afford to purchase or lease a flat in a privately operated scheme.

## 7.3 Working Age Adults

For working age adults, we have drawn on an initial, high-level, analysis of the available data on levels of need and provision in 2022. Going forward, we will consider whether this cohort would also benefit from a more in-depth housing needs analysis.

There are currently 345 working age adults with care and accommodation needs in Bracknell Forest. In line with policy and good practice, the majority of working age adults (293) have their care and accommodation needs met through supported living provision (individual and shared) in the local area. A small number of people with complex, specialist support needs are supported in residential or nursing care settings. The largest cohort of people with care and accommodation needs in the working age category are adults with a learning disability, followed by people with physical disability and sensory needs and then people with mental health needs.

Our review of the data indicates that the numbers within the working age adult's cohort are not expected to change significantly over the next 5 years and that overall there is sufficient care and accommodation provision to continue to meet the needs of the majority of working age adults over this period. However, there are some areas of need that will require more specialist provision. In addition, across all groups, there is a need for short-term care and accommodation provision that can support people whilst a longer-term solution is sourced. This may be in the form of short-term training/transition flats that enable a period of assessment and planning.

### Adults with learning disabilities

The provision of settled and appropriate housing along with specialist support for people with learning disabilities plays a key role in improving outcomes for this group. Public health measures show that the proportion of adults with a learning disability living in stable and appropriate accommodation in Bracknell Forest is 89%, which is currently one of the highest rates in south-east England (Source: [Wider Determinants of Health - Data - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://phe.org.uk)).

The vast majority of adults with a learning disability with care and accommodation needs are living in supported living accommodation (243), with only small numbers in residential care (28) and nursing homes (4). This reflects a general shift over recent years away from housing people in residential care homes and nursing homes, towards supported housing models.

For adults with a learning disability 18 out of 28 placements in residential or nursing care are out of area. The main reason for out of area placements historically is the lack of provision locally for specialist support around challenging behaviour.

The accommodation and housing with care review research carried out by Housing LIN in 2018 looked at the longer term needs of people with learning disabilities. The research estimated the future need for people with learning disabilities and autism and the housing and accommodation options that will best meet this need and provide cost-effective solutions. This projected an estimated net additional need for supported housing provision to 2035 of 64 places in 24/7 supported housing and 16 places for people living in a tenancy with support.

One growing area of need is for suitable accommodation for people with learning disabilities who are ageing. A recent needs analysis identified a number of people living in shared supported accommodation that may not be able to meet their needs in the next 5 years due to the requirement for ground floor and suitably adapted accommodation as they get older. The Council is currently working on a project to develop a specialist supported living scheme in Bracknell Forest to meet this need.

There is also a potential need for group/shared supported living accommodation for younger adults with learning disabilities. At this stage, it is planned to meet this need through reuse of shared provision that becomes vacant as a result of the new supported living development for older people (see above). Compatibility is an important consideration for the learning disability team when supporting people to move into a supported living setting, which has led to a number of voids across the service. Reducing void levels may reduce the need to source additional accommodation in future.

## **Adults with physical disabilities & sensory needs**

31 people with physical disability & sensory needs are currently placed in accommodation with care, of which 20 are in supported living, 6 in residential care and 5 in nursing homes. Of those in residential and nursing care, a majority are placed in the local area. No additional need for specialist housing provision has been identified.

## **Adults with a mental health condition**

Maintaining stable and appropriate accommodation with access to specialist support services are essential to enable people with a mental health condition to maintain their homes as independently as possible. It plays a key role in improving mental health outcomes by promoting personalisation and quality of life and preventing the need to readmit people into hospital or more costly residential care.

In Bracknell Forest the proportion of adults in contact with secondary mental health services living independently in stable and appropriate accommodation has remained broadly the same for the last five years at around 68%. This number is above the regional (South-East, 61%) and national (England, 58%) comparators.

There are 22 people currently placed in care and accommodation provision, of which a majority are in supported living placements (13). Nine people are in residential or nursing care, mostly outside of the local area due to a lack of suitable specialist provision in the borough. A need for specialist housing provision has been identified in relation to people with more complex mental health conditions (see below).

## **Adults with more complex needs**

A gap in provision exists for people with highly complex, or specialist needs, including people with mental health needs who require support under Section 117 and people with a learning disability and/or autism who display behaviour that challenges, including those with a mental health condition. For this cohort a fundamental matter will be identifying specialist support providers that can support the complex needs and levels of challenging behaviour. The number of people with these needs is small which creates a challenge when developing and sustaining specialist, local provision.

One of the ways the council can respond to this challenge is through greater partnership working across the East Berkshire area to achieve economies of scale in the provision of specialist supported housing. Work is being taken forward in partnership with East Berkshire Local Authorities and the Integrated Care Board to develop care and accommodation models locally for people with a learning disability and/ or autism who display behaviour that challenges, including those with a mental health condition. Bracknell Forest is taking a lead role in this project to identify the specific housing needs of this cohort and will seek capital investment from NHS England to develop specialist provision to meet those needs.

## 7.4 Providing Aids and adaptations

The Council's Housing service is committed to working together with Health and Social Care services to support older and disabled people to remain living independently in their own homes for as long as is safely possible. Home adaptations are known to be cost-effective ways of preventing falls and injuries, improving mental health and the ability to perform everyday activities, and making homes more suitable for people with cognitive and behaviour disabilities. They also help to support wider objectives such as enabling faster hospital discharge, relieving pressures on accident and emergency and wider health care services, and reducing the need for residential care.

Bracknell Forest Council's Housing Assistance Policy<sup>10</sup> sets out the range of financial assistance that the Council can make available to vulnerable and disabled residents, to adapt and improve their properties to meet their needs. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) can fund improvements such as level access showers, stairlifts, through floor lifts and, in some cases, home extensions. The assistance is potentially available for households in all tenures of housing. In 2021/22, the council spent a total of £520,000 on delivering DFGs, with 31 improvement works completed, from a budget of £968,000. The aim is to increase spending and the number of works completed over the coming years.

The discretionary grants outlined within the policy include the availability of additional funding for works that are more extensive than the current mandatory DFG limit allows, through Discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance 'top-up' funding. The policy enables financial assistance to be provided to cover the client's means tested contribution, by way of a Contribution Assistance Grant. It also allows potential funding support for those whose home cannot be adapted to meet their needs, to enable them to move to a more suitable property. In addition, a range of smaller, bespoke grants are available to support specific aims such as enabling faster hospital discharge and supporting people with dementia.

The enhanced grant provision outlined within this policy supports the aims and ambitions of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Better Care Fund Plan for 2022/2023, to promote joint working across the Council and the Frimley Integrated Care System (ICS) to enable older and disabled people to remain living independently in their own home for longer, avoiding unnecessary admissions to hospital and enabling a safe and timely discharge home after a hospital stay.

Other improvements that we have made to the DFG service during the last year include:

- reviewing the service to speed up applications and significantly reduce waiting times as well as dealing with a backlog of referrals
- improving our contact with customers and engagement with partner organisations
- replacing poorly performing contractors and engaging more reliable companies

However, there remain significant challenges including rapidly rising costs in material and labour, difficulties recruiting sufficient experienced staff to deliver and develop the service and responding to new legislation and ensuring compliance with legal requirements. At the same time, we are seeing an increase in the overall demand for aids and adaptations.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-07/housing-assistance-policy.pdf>

Our key priorities going forward are to:

- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service by implementing a new case management system and new performance management and reporting systems
- Introduce a framework of contractors to speed up the commissioning and completion of works
- Recruit a fully trained, skilled, staff team to drive improved service delivery
- Seek greater collaboration with key partners such as Adult and Children's Social Care and health services
- Promote a shift in approach that supports early intervention and prevention

## **7.5 Looked after children and care leavers**

Housing is one of the most significant challenges that young care leavers face, with a limited choice in accommodation and a lack of affordable rented housing. The local authority, as corporate parent, is responsible for achieving the best outcomes for looked after children and care leavers, including enabling access to accommodation and support across a range of needs.

The Leaving Care team at Bracknell Forest currently has an active caseload of 70 Care Leavers aged between 18 and 21. There are also a further 70 Care Leavers aged between 22 and 25 who continue to be entitled to support, should the need arise. One of the most common reasons for Care Leavers returning for support is because of a housing need.

The majority of Care Leavers are in independent living, supported accommodation or semi-independent accommodation. Around 10% of care leavers stay with their former foster carers in 'Staying Put' arrangements. Overall, the preferred approach is for care leavers to meet their housing needs in supported accommodation. The aim is to support young people to become 'tenancy ready' and reduce the risk of mainstream social housing breaking down, resulting in people becoming homeless.

Semi-independent accommodation is currently commissioned from Look Ahead and a number of other framework providers. Look Ahead provides 75 supported places for post 16 children and young people, including care leavers and looked after children. In addition, the Life project provides accommodation & housing support for 6 young single mothers, living with their babies, and single pregnant women aged 16 to 25 years old. In future, we will look for opportunities to expand provision for young people focusing on lower support move-on accommodation.

Our key priorities for Looked After Children and Care Leavers going forward are to:

- Review the contract with Look Ahead to ensure that this provision continues to meet the needs of both Looked After Children and Care Leavers
- Raise awareness of and increase the number of 'Staying Put' arrangements as an alternative option for Care Leavers
- Agree a protocol for care leavers, between the Housing Service and Children's Social Care
- Explore future funding programmes and options to expand dedicated accommodation for young people

## Key challenges in meeting care and accommodation needs

- Meeting the future need for housing with support for older people, including Extra Care provision and nursing care provision for older people with more complex needs, including dementia and behaviour that may challenge
- Providing increased Supported Living options for working age adults to meet gaps in provision for people complex needs and behaviour that challenges
- Developing flexible models of care and support that can respond to urgent care and accommodation needs to enable people to maximise their independence and avoid inappropriate placements
- Meeting increasing demand for funding for aids and adaptations so that people can remain living independently in their homes for as long as possible.
- Ensuring a co-ordinated approach to meeting the needs of young people, particularly those leaving care, under the Council's responsibility as 'Corporate Parent'

## 7.6 What we are doing to address these issues

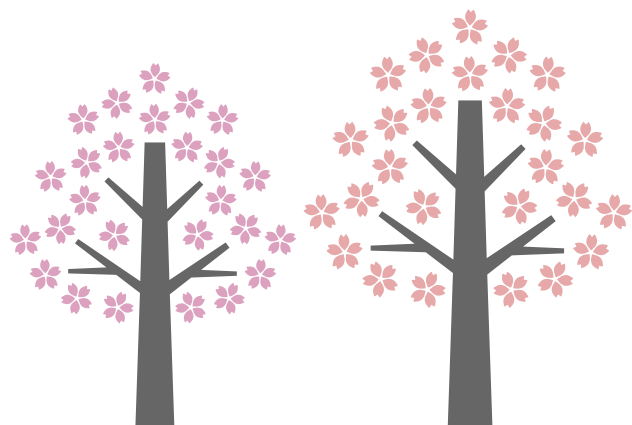
The approach to meeting our care and accommodation needs is based on the principles of collaboration and co-production. Collaboration means working across housing and social care services, as well as with external housing, health and care and support providers, to ensure a whole system approach that delivers good outcomes and value for money for people and for the council. Co-production ensures that people who use services, and their families and carers, influence and shape the care and accommodation options available to them in Bracknell Forest so that they can live healthy, safe, and independent lives with care and support when they need it. The work that is currently underway includes:

- Developing a new provision for people with learning disabilities that need higher levels of care and support
- Undertaking a review of current supported housing provision for young people
- Continuing to review the number, type, and location of supported accommodation in the area for different groups
- Resolving outstanding Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) applications and prioritising current referrals according to need, setting out a clear, straightforward process that is easily understood by customers and partners
- Preparing a Market Position Statement which outlines what support and care services people need, gaps in current provision and how they can be met, the future shape of care and support in the local area and how this will be funded and purchased.



## What we will do in future

- Work in partnership with other providers to deliver the objectives and priorities identified in the Care & Accommodation Strategy
- Deliver an enhanced support and adaptations service that supports the aims and ambitions of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Better Care Fund Plan for households to remain living in their homes, where appropriate
- Explore flexible models of care and support for emergency/ short-term/ transitional care and accommodation across a range of client groups
- Undertake partnership work across East Berkshire and the Frimley NHS area to develop opportunities for market development of specialist provision for people with highly complex, or specialist needs, including people with mental health needs
- Work with partners and developers to encourage the development of new Extra Care Schemes and nursing care to meet future needs
- Explore options to expand provision for young people, including lower support move-on accommodation
- Undertake a review of supported living provision for adults with a learning disability, develop a commissioning plan and review current panel arrangements and costs



# 8. Conclusion: Taking the strategy forward

The Housing Strategy is a high-level strategic document and as such it does not include a detailed delivery plan.

There are a range of individual plans and strategies that support, and are supported by, this Housing Strategy. These include

- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026
- Private Sector Housing Policy 2020
- Housing Assistance Policy 2021
- Health and Well-being Strategy 2022-2026
- Ending Enough Sleeping Action Plan 2021
- Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024
- Climate Change Strategy 2020-2024

The objectives and priorities in the housing strategy will be delivered primarily through the actions and plans agreed in these documents, along with additional actions to be formulated through the development of new policies and strategies that are underway, for example:

- Care and Accommodation Strategy
- Emerging Bracknell Forest Local Plan
- Revised Housing Allocations Policy
- Housing Supplementary Planning Document

## Partnership working

The delivery of the strategy relies upon effective joint working with our partners, including government departments and agencies, other public sector organisations, the voluntary sector, and housing providers. We will continue to engage partners and stakeholders through a range of groups and meetings:

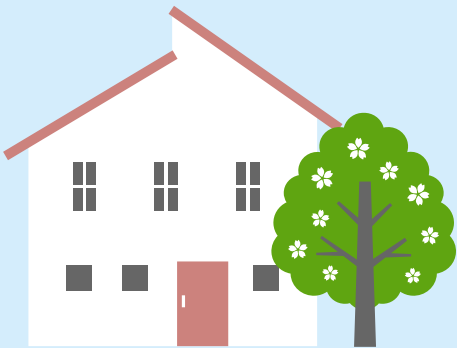
- Homelessness Forum
- Landlords Forum
- Quarterly Homes England meetings
- Registered Provider Housing Management meetings
- Planning and Building Control Agents' Forum
- Community Safety Partnership

We will also work with neighbouring authorities on issues where we share common needs and priorities.

## Monitoring progress

We shall monitor and assess our progress towards achieving the objectives in this strategy on a regular basis, as well as continuing to review and report on housing performance through the quarterly corporate performance indicators.





Bracknell Forest  
**Housing Strategy**

2023-2028

January