



# Bracknell Forest Housing Strategy

Consultation Report  
**2023-2028**

# 1. Consultation Plan

A draft housing strategy was presented to the Council's Management Team at the end of August 2022 with a recommendation to launch a period of public consultation. The recommendation was approved and a consultation draft was published on the Council's website, with the aim of seeking views and comments from individuals, groups and organisations. Consultation on the draft housing strategy took place throughout September and October 2022 and ended in early November.

The main methods of consultation used were as follows:

- Public consultation through an online survey ran over a period of 6 weeks from 22 September to 3 November 2022
- A Member workshop held in October 2022
- Promotion of the strategy to local organisations through the Homelessness Forum
- Key organisations contacted and invited to provide comments on the strategy
- Meetings with key stakeholders

A communications plan was developed to promote the housing strategy consultation as widely as possible. Communication took place using the following channels:

- Promotion of strategy and survey in staff magazine Forest Views and on the Council's Intranet
- Targeted emails to voluntary organisations, statutory bodies, housing providers
- Email to Council Members and Town and Parish Councils to promote the survey
- Promotion of strategy/survey on main page of Council's website
- Promotion in the Council's Town and Country newsletter to residents

The following list of groups were specifically contacted through targeted emails:

- Council officers
- Members
- Voluntary organisations
- Specialist agencies working with particular groups
- Registered providers (RPs)
- Town and Parish Councils
- Statutory bodies e.g. Health trust, DWP, Probation, schools

## 2. Member workshop

A Member workshop was held on the 10 October, with all Members invited to attend. This was attended by 24 Council Members.

The aim of the session was to give Members the chance to highlight key housing issues in Bracknell Forest, seek further information or clarity about any matters in the strategy, and give their views on the proposed actions and priorities set out in the draft strategy.

The workshop began with a presentation on the housing strategy, followed by a question and answer session. Four breakout discussion groups were facilitated, each looking at one of the priority areas in the draft housing strategy.

Below is a summary of the key points raised.

Issue raised	Response
<p><b>Wheelchair accessible homes</b></p> <p>Insufficient larger adapted homes are available for families with disabled children as developers focus mainly on one bed wheelchair adapted homes.</p>	<p>We have reviewed the latest data on demand for wheelchair homes of different sizes and the supply of properties becoming available. This has indicated that most of the new and existing supply of adapted homes is one bed properties. By contrast the supply of two and three bedroom adapted properties is much lower. The Strategy has been amended to give greater emphasis to the need for 2 and 3 bed adapted properties.</p>
<p><b>Young people</b></p> <p>Lack of affordable rented options to enable young people to move out of family homes and save for a deposit</p>	<p>The Council commissions placements in specialist supported accommodation for young people who are more vulnerable and have support needs, such as care leavers and former looked after children.</p> <p>For the majority of young people looking to move out of the family home, their main option will be private rented accommodation, with houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) offering the most affordable accommodation.</p> <p>The Strategy has been amended to highlight the role of HMO accommodation in meeting the housing needs of young people, especially given that housing benefit payments will only cover accommodation with shared facilities and not self-contained one-bedroom flats.</p> <p>An action has been added to explore future funding programmes and options to expand dedicated accommodation for young people, including lower support move-on accommodation.</p>

Issue raised	Response
<p><b>Modular Homes</b></p> <p>What consideration is being given to modular homes to speed up development?</p>	<p>Modular homes have a recognised role in delivering new homes, alongside traditional construction methods. A point has been added into the strategy to indicate the council's support for modular construction where it can speed up development.</p>
<p><b>Hidden homelessness (and sofa surfing)</b></p> <p>There should be greater mention of this in the strategy and what can be done about it.</p>	<p>The lack of data on the extent and forms of hidden homelessness in the borough make it difficult to report on this.</p> <p>During the pandemic, many hidden homeless households did seek support due to the breakdown of shared living arrangements under Covid. The local authority significantly increased its provision for single people through its rough sleeping and preventing homelessness programmes. There was also an increase in families approaching the local authority and placed in temporary accommodation during this time.</p> <p>The Strategy has been amended to highlight the importance of effective partnership working between agencies to address hidden homelessness, ensuring that households are identified and linked to the increased range of advice and support services now available, especially in the case of more vulnerable, or at risk, households.</p>
<p><b>HMO licensing</b></p> <p>Important to keep standards up. But also, should be publicising to the public the benefits of HMOs and the role they play (e.g. for young people), as they are generally viewed negatively.</p>	<p>The Strategy has been amended to highlight the role of the private rented sector, and HMOs in particular, in meeting the needs of single people, including, young people. Additional emphasis has been given to the need for proactive work to ensure high standards in this type of accommodation and to tackle poor conditions and management.</p>
<p><b>Affordable housing</b></p> <p>Important to ensure that a good share of the affordable housing requirement is provided as family houses and not all as flats.</p>	<p>The need to improve the supply of larger affordable homes is already recognised in the housing strategy. Additional analysis and targets for delivering more larger affordable homes have been included in the strategy.</p>
<p><b>Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)</b></p> <p>Action is needed to ensure that people seek assistance with aids and adaptations at an early stage so they can have the works done that they need to remain living in their homes before it is too late.</p>	<p>The current service priority is reducing waiting times and building resources within the service to improve service delivery. A future action has been added in the strategy to address this point - to promote the service through publicity, social media, website review, etc.</p>

# 3. Responses to the Online survey

The online survey was promoted to local residents and a range of groups in order to seek feedback on the draft strategy. The survey consisted of seven questions. The responses to these are summarised below.

A total of 62 responses were received. These included responses from the following groups:

- Residents
- Local voluntary organisations, e.g. Pilgrims Heart, Ark, Steeping Stones
- Community Mental Health Team
- Drug and Alcohol Team
- Bracknell Forest Council staff
- Registered Providers
- Councillors
- Social Prescribers
- Berkshire Primary Care

## Summary of responses received

### 1. Does the housing strategy adequately capture the key housing-related issues and challenges in the local area?

42% said yes, 55% said no.

### 2. Are there any other issues or groups of people we should be looking at?

The main issues raised are summarised in the table below. Our response to these, including proposed amendments to the strategy, are indicated in the second column.

Issue raised	Response
<p><b>Older people</b></p> <p>There are limited sheltered accommodation options available for people who do not own their property and therefore cannot afford to purchase/lease a flat in a sheltered or extra care model of accommodation.</p>	<p>There are a range of affordable sheltered accommodation options available in the borough for people who do not own their homes and waiting times are not long.</p> <p>For older people requiring a higher level of support and care, most of the extra care provision available is on a leasehold basis or at market rents. The lack of affordable extra care provision has been identified as a priority need in the housing strategy.</p>

Issue raised	Response
<p><b>Mental Health</b></p> <p>More respite flats are needed for mental health clients, short-term assessment flats for people with hoarding disorder or other mental health conditions to inform onward care and housing planning, and homeless temporary accommodation units for mental health clients, away from people with histories of drug and alcohol abuse or offending as mental health clients are vulnerable to exploitation in general purpose temporary housing.</p>	<p>The strategy has identified some unmet need around people with more complex and challenging mental health conditions. The strategy also recognises that there are high levels of mental health support needs among the rough sleeper population and proposes a new mental health support service to address this need.</p> <p>We will continue to engage with the Community Mental Health Service to understand the demand for specialist mental health accommodation.</p>
<p><b>Drug and Alcohol users</b></p> <p>This group is not mentioned in the strategy, and nor are offenders leaving custody. Both groups can be very hard to accommodate due to their complex needs.</p>	<p>The strategy outlines the support being provided to assist single homeless people towards long-term housing solutions. This includes working with other agencies to ensure effective referral pathways and protocols for people leaving recovery services and prison. The strategy has been amended to make more specific reference to people with drug and alcohol addiction as part of the work we are doing to prevent and tackle homelessness.</p> <p>We will continue to engage with the Drug and Alcohol Team to understand these issues and how we can work with them around the housing needs of this group.</p>
<p><b>Parking</b></p> <p>Concerns around lack of parking on existing and new developments – more provision of off-road parking needed.</p>	<p>The future local housing need is established using the Government’s standard methodology. The need for sustainable development that protects the local green belt as far as possible whilst ensuring sufficient land is made available to meet future housing needs is emphasised in the emerging Local Plan and in the housing strategy. The application of planning policies to individual sites is a matter for the planning service. The communication of planning applications is a matter for the local planning authority which acts in accordance with legal requirements to publicise all planning applications.</p>

Issue raised	Response
<p><b>Affordability of housing</b></p> <p>Private rents are too expensive for most. There is not enough help for people in the middle, single people, and couples without children, who are stuck in expensive private rental properties, have no priority for social housing and are unable to access shared ownership housing. More affordable flats are needed for ordinary people to rent and purchase in Bracknell centre.</p>	<p>Overall, it is the role of the Local Plan to identify the future need for housing of different tenures, types, and sizes. The emerging Local Plan estimates the need for affordable rented and affordable home ownership housing and sets out policies to deliver this.</p> <p>The strategy recognises the challenge of a relatively small private rented sector, high demand, and increasing rents, with Local Housing Allowance rates remaining frozen. It identifies actions and priorities which aim to increase access to affordable housing e.g. shared ownership housing is supported as an affordable way into home ownership for some households in the private rented sector, and an increase in larger affordable rented homes to respond to unmet demand for family accommodation.</p>
<p><b>Under-occupiers</b></p> <p>More needs to be done to move elderly single occupiers out of larger homes that they do not need to enable families in small flats to use these properties.</p>	<p>Reducing under-occupation of social homes is already a priority in the strategy. This is a complex matter as many older residents would consider moving to smaller properties with the right help and support, but they cannot be required to do so as they will have been granted life-long, secure tenancies. We are working with Silva Homes, the largest provider of social housing, on initiatives to support under-occupiers to downsize by providing practical help and incentives to move, tailored to each individual's circumstances.</p>
<p><b>Affordable housing</b></p> <p>More affordable houses are needed for local families rather than more flats.</p>	<p>The need for larger affordable homes has been recognised in the housing strategy and evidence has been provided showing the critical shortfall of larger family properties. A range of actions have been set out to deliver more larger affordable homes and to reverse the concentration on smaller properties offered by developers to meet their affordable housing obligations.</p>

### 3. From the perspective of your service/organisation, what are the three most important housing issues that we should focus on in Bracknell Forest?

The three most important housing issues identified, in order of ranking, were:

- Affordability of housing - 22%
- Increasing social housing - 11%
- Supporting first time buyers - 10%

### 4. Do you support the 4 strategic priorities in the housing strategy?

**64% of respondents supported the four priorities.**

Other priorities suggested by respondents were:

- More emphasis on improving energy use
- The need to increase social housing especially 3 bedrooms and larger
- More focus on mitigating the impact of house-building on roads and parking and ensuring sufficient infrastructure
- Greater emphasis on using all existing property to its full potential rather than building more homes

### 5. For each of the 4 priorities, please tell us whether you agree with the proposed actions set out in the housing strategy and executive summary?

There was strong agreement with the proposed actions set out under each priority area.

- 64% agreed with the priority to provide housing and support options to prevent homelessness.
- 68% agreed with the priority to deliver new homes that meet the needs of local residents.
- 81% agreed with the priority to improve and make the best use of existing homes.
- 83% agreed with the priority to ensure housing options for people with care and support needs.

### 6. Are there any other actions that your service/organisation are undertaking, or that the Council could be taking forward, which would help deliver these priorities?

Other actions suggested by respondents are summarised below. Our responses, including proposed amendments to the strategy, are indicated in the second column.



Other actions proposed	Response
<p>Reduce the ‘waiting’ time developers have after the application has been approved to start the build and place penalties if conditions have not been met; ensure that affordable housing is included in any plans.</p>	<p>By law, any planning permission granted expires after a certain period, which usually means developers have up to 3 years from the date of the approval, otherwise the permission lapses. We have not found evidence to suggest that developers are failing to commence schemes within this time period. However, on larger sites it is common for developers to submit an outline application initially and once approved, to bring in more detailed reserved matters applications for each individual phase. This is permitted within planning rules and may explain the long waiting time that is apparent before commencement. Affordable housing proposals should be included in all relevant applications in accordance with the requirements of the Local Plan and national planning guidelines.</p> <p>An additional point has been included in the strategy to encourage developers to engage at an early stage with the planning service on their proposed design, which can help to reduce the length of time at the planning stage.</p>
<p>Widen the range of mental health accommodation available, i.e. supported Accommodation and respite flats.</p>	<p>In order to better understand the need for specialist accommodation for people with mental health conditions we will continue to engage with the Community Mental Health Service to establish what the demand is and how we can address it.</p>
<p>Consider financial incentives to improve insulation and energy use.</p>	<p>The strategy outlines the range of government grants and schemes, and other schemes run by the energy companies and the local authority in the housing strategy. These are listed on the Council’s website <a href="https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk">Warm safe and well   Bracknell Forest Council (bracknell-forest.gov.uk)</a>. It has also been noted that there are qualifying criteria that limit who and what kinds of property are eligible.</p>

Other actions proposed	Response
<p>There should be a reference in the strategy to the 10 year Drug Strategy, From Harm to Hope. Housing is theme that runs through the strategy with specific mention, for example, of housing officers being based in community substance misuse services and the recruitment of housing specialist in prisons.</p>	<p>The Strategy has been amended to include reference to the Government's 10 year drug strategy, which includes a commitment to improve access to accommodation and support for those affected by drug addiction, recognising that housing is an important part of their treatment and recovery.</p> <p>We will engage further with the Drug and Alcohol Team to understand these issues and how we can work with them around the local housing needs of people recovering from a drug addiction.</p>
<p>A continued and ongoing dialogue is needed with registered providers (RPs) to allow them to fully understand the current and future challenges the Council wishes to address, along with early communication on any specific programmes which could be eligible for Homes England grant funding to assist in the delivery of homes which meet the needs of the community.</p>	<p>The Strategy has been amended to include an action to ensure ongoing dialogue with Registered Providers to enable them to understand the Council's priorities and the opportunities for joint working using available funding programmes to deliver these.</p>

## 4. Other comments received

In addition to issues raised through the online consultation and member workshop, some additional comments were received outside of these channels.

Issue raised	Proposed response
<p><b>Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)</b></p> <p>Ensure that the Council’s approach to DFGs links to and supports the objectives of the Better Care Fund Plan 2022/23 to support disabled and older people to remain living independently in their own homes where it is appropriate for them to do so.</p>	<p>Additional wording has been added into the strategy to highlight the role of the housing assistance policy in supporting the Better Care Fund plan and Health and Welfare Being strategy.</p>

## 5. Conclusions

The formal consultation on the housing strategy has now completed and we want to thank respondents for telling us about the issues, challenges and groups of concern to them. The main themes have been summarised in this report and we have proposed additions and amendments to the latest draft of the strategy to address these.

Respondents agreed with many of the issues and challenges identified in the strategy. Chief areas of concern related to the development of new build housing, including concerns about adequate parking and infrastructure, and the affordability of much new and existing housing. Other prominent issues were the lack of affordable housing options for young people and low- and middle-income households and the need to increase the future supply affordable housing, especially for families.

The consultation also raised concerns around the unmet needs of certain groups including people with mental health issues, older people, young people, people with disabilities, and under-occupiers. These issues have been noted and fed into the equalities analysis of the housing strategy.

There was a high degree of support for the 4 strategic priorities in the draft housing strategy and for the actions proposed under each. Some additional actions around meeting the housing needs of particular groups such as people with mental health issues, ex-offenders and people recovering from drug or alcohol addiction have been added into the strategy. We will also respond to the proposal that greater dialogue takes place with Registered Providers about the Council’s future priorities through an action in the strategy.



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