

**Public**  
**Key Decision - Yes**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Housing Strategy 2026-2031

**Meeting/Date:** Cabinet  
21 April 2026

**Executive Portfolio:** Cllr S. Wakeford, Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy & Housing

**Report by:** Head of Economy, Regeneration and Housing Delivery

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **Executive Summary:**

Huntingdonshire District Council's (HDC) current Housing Strategy was adopted by the Council in October 2020 and covered the period between 2020 to 2025, it was reviewed in December 2021 and June 2023. It is now necessary to develop a new Housing Strategy that covers the Council for the next five years or until a new strategy is developed following Local Government Reorganisation.

Since the 2020 Housing Strategy was published there has been a considerable amount of energy and commitment invested in implementing the strategy and achieving the objectives in the action plan, that were set at the time, these are referenced in the new strategy.

In developing the new five year strategy we have continued to align the strategy with the Council's Corporate Plan and Place Strategy, as we had following the mid term review in 2023 and in addition recognise the number of significant policy and legislative changes that now need to be factored into our thinking for the next five years.

This strategy sets out a comprehensive approach for the Council to focus on its strategic role to meet a broad range of housing objectives.

### **Recommendation(s):**

That Cabinet is requested to:

- Consider the contents of this report and;
- Approve the New Housing Strategy and Action Plan.

## **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To set out the strategic direction for housing in Huntingdonshire for the next five years.
- 1.2 To highlight the housing priorities for the district and how these will be achieved by the Council directly and through working in partnership with others under the Do, Enable, Influence model of action of the Corporate Plan
- 1.3 To set out an action plan for the strategy that recognises the housing priorities.

## **BACKGROUND**

- 1.4 Huntingdonshire last Housing Strategy was adopted in October 2020 for the period 2020-2025, it was reviewed in December 2021 and June 2023.
- 1.5 It is now necessary to deliver a new Housing Strategy for the period 2026-2031 and recognise a number of significant policy and legislative changes that now need to be factored into the Council's thinking over the next five years. This strategy sets out a comprehensive approach on how the Council will focus on its housing objectives as part of its strategic housing role.
- 1.6 The strategy will continue to align with the Corporate Plan and Place Strategy ensuring that actions will follow the Do, Enable, Influence model.
- 1.7 Since the last Housing Strategy was published there has been a considerable amount of energy and commitment invested in implementing the strategy and achieving the objectives in the action plan. These are referenced in the key achievement section of the new strategy on Page 24.
- 1.8 This new strategy includes the outcome of the recent Local Housing Needs Assessment which shows continued high levels of housing demand in Huntingdonshire and the role housing plays in determining good health and quality of life for our residents.
- 1.9 Whilst there is no specific duty for the Council to have an up to date Housing Strategy it is considered good practice. With changes being brought about by Local Government Reorganisation it remains essential for HDC to have an up to date strategy as the reshaping of local government is likely to take several years to fully implement, while housing need across Huntingdonshire continues to evolve; updating the strategy ensures the Council can respond to current challenges , such as housing affordability, homelessness prevention and population growth and the delivery of new homes.

## **COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

- 2.1 The Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) Panel discussed the report at its meeting on 1st April 2026.

- 2.2 Councillor Gardener expressed concerns regarding the implications for rural areas. While acknowledging and supporting the points set out in paragraph 7.215 of the report, he highlighted the limited availability of local services and transport links in such communities. He noted that access to essential services, such as GP appointments, often requires the use of a private vehicle, which can be costly to maintain. Councillor Gardener therefore queried the rationale for granting planning permission for affordable housing in rural locations and requested that these considerations be fully reflected and addressed within the development of the new Strategy.
- 2.3 Councillor Tevlin endorsed the points raised by Councillor Gardener and emphasised the importance of ensuring that, when developing a housing strategy, proposed sites are appropriate, accessible, and well-served by local amenities. She stressed that such considerations should be approached at a strategic level. Councillor Tevlin further highlighted the need to prioritise locations with adequate infrastructure and to ensure that community engagement forms a key part of the decision-making process.
- 2.4 The Panel was advised that the question raised related to planning decisions, which do not form part of the Council's strategic approach to housing. It was acknowledged that a wide range of factors are considered when determining planning applications. The Panel was reminded that the purpose of the policy is to outline the identified needs and challenges which will be incorporated in the Local Plan review.
- 2.5 It was noted that a significant number of housing schemes delivered within rural communities are brought forward under the Rural Exception Policy, as set out in the current Local Plan. Members were advised that such schemes are typically supported by Parish Councils, informed by the housing needs assessments undertaken through the Council's partnership work with Cambridgeshire ACRE. It was emphasised that the Policy requires clear evidence of local housing need before any Rural Exception Site can be granted permission.
- 2.6 Councillor Pickering expressed his support for the report and asked whether the proposed actions could be further developed to provide greater clarity and a more detailed explanation of the strategy and its implementation.
- 2.7 It was noted that Officers would be happy to provide Members with further detail on how the Team operates and how specific actions are delivered, should Members require it. Officers also advised that they anticipate the Strategy may be reviewed and refreshed by a future Administration. The structure of the current document was designed intentionally to allow for future development and expansion.
- 2.8 It was noted that several recent legislative changes will inform a number of key service-specific actions that the Council intends to deliver over the next year.
- 2.9 Councillor Martin raised concerns regarding the projected increase in residents with mobility issues and dementia, noting that the report did not

indicate a corresponding rise in the provision of M4(3) housing. He suggested that the Council consider alternative models, such as building homes that can be more easily adapted for wheelchair use in the future, as this may reduce long-term costs. Councillor Martin also queried how developers could be encouraged or required to incorporate such adaptability from the outset.

- 2.10 It was confirmed that LPAG has held discussions regarding disability and accessibility requirements within housing provision. Members were advised that significant work has been undertaken to establish the Council's expectations in this area, which will form part of the emerging New Local Plan. It was noted that the Housing Strategy Team is currently working alongside the Local Plan Team to consider the viability aspects of delivering new accessible housing. Members acknowledged that incorporating M4(3) standards at the outset is considerably more cost-effective than adapting properties retrospectively. An option under consideration is to adopt a graded approach using M4(3), given the range of accessibility levels it offers. The aim is to ensure that new homes are accessible, provide a suitable living environment for residents, and support individuals to remain in their homes for as long as possible without requiring additional facilities or care.
- 2.11 After further comments from Councillor Martin, it was confirmed that this Housing Strategy identifies an overall need and direction of travel which will help to inform the policy. The Council will then be able to use other guidance notes which could then help in discussions with developers as earlier suggested.
- 2.12 In response to a question from Councillor Kadewere regarding risks, the Panel was advised that the Housing Strategy enables the Team to work collaboratively across the organisation. Teams including Communities, Private Sector Housing, and Housing Needs and Homelessness have contributed to the development of the Strategy, which helps to mitigate risk.
- 2.13 In response to a query regarding the Council's progress in implementing the Housing Strategy, the Panel's attention was drawn to the case studies set out within the report. These examples highlighted the challenges faced, while demonstrating the significant progress made in delivering much-needed affordable housing across the District.
- 2.14 Councillor Jennings requested that the report be made clearer and more relevant for residents, ensuring it sets out what the Council plans to do to increase the delivery of affordable housing.
- 2.15 The Panel was advised that the Team would use the Council's website to clearly communicate to residents the actions being taken as part of the Housing Strategy.
- 2.16 Councillor Tevlin expressed concerns regarding the Housing Providers, suggesting that new providers should be sought due to the volume of complaints she has received from residents.

- 2.17 It was noted that the District currently has housing stock that does not meet the quality standards the Council expects, due in part to long-term underinvestment in previous years. The Administration acknowledged that it cannot simply issue directives to improve conditions and is instead working collaboratively with Housing Association partners to support residents more effectively. Members were advised that the Council maintains regular engagement with Places for People, including quarterly meetings. A recent meeting with Members has also enabled direct contact between them and the organisation. It was confirmed that this improved engagement has strengthened the Council's relationship with Places for People over the past year, and the organisation is now implementing significant improvements to its housing stock within the District.
- 2.18 In response to a question from Councillor Taylor regarding Key Worker eligibility and local connection criteria, the Panel was advised that a local connection is ideally defined as both living and working within the area; however, applicants who solely work in the area may also meet the requirement. Officers emphasised the importance of Key Worker provision and confirmed that work is underway to expand this offer. The Edison Bell Way scheme was highlighted as a current example, as it is being specifically targeted towards Key Workers due to its location.
- 2.19 Councillor Gleadow expressed her recognition that the Strategy would be subject to change due to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and that there were gaps regarding risk management, referencing no account for developer behaviour.
- 2.20 The Panel heard that this would be taken into account and added to the Strategy.
- 2.21 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

### **KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 3.1 A Housing Strategy is required to provide the overall framework for housing activity in an area, including development, homelessness, private sector housing, affordable housing etc. Therefore, without one it could lead to different teams working without clear shared direction, different housing policies not aligning and a difficulty in prioritising activities.

### **LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN OBJECTIVES**

- 4.1 The completion of a Housing Strategy is an objective of HDC's Corporate Plan 2023 – 2028 and aligns to the plan under the Priority – “In creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations”, under the outcome of Improving Housing.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Whilst there is no specific statutory duty on Local Authorities to produce a Housing Strategy, most Local Authorities consider it best practice to have

one, especially as they must carry out several other statutory duties in relation to Housing, including the maintenance of a Housing Allocation Scheme, reviewing housing conditions, developing a Homelessness Strategy and Tenancy Strategy.

- 5.2 Senior Officers across the Council have reviewed the new housing strategy, including colleagues from Communities and Housing Operations, Planning and Environmental Health.

### **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There will be no additional resource implications, in implementing this Strategy, activities relating directly to HDC will be undertaken by existing teams and partnerships are already established to enable other actions to be developed.

### **HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Within the Health and Wellbeing Integrated Care Strategy, there is a priority of, *“Reducing poverty through better housing, employment and skills”* This review identifies the links across this strategy and the Housing Strategy.

### **ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 In February 2023 the Council formally approved the Council’s Climate Strategy this recognises that the current cost of living and climate crises require joint attention to support the wellbeing of residents and businesses. In passing this motion, the council committed to not only the delivery of a Climate Strategy but also that in making decisions it will wherever possible seek to contribute to positive environmental and social benefits. The delivery of good quality, secure accommodation for residents supports this ambition.

### **EQUALITIES**

- 9.1 The Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 9.2 Understanding the need for housing in HDC helps support this duty.

## **Appendix 1**

- Housing Strategy 2026 – 2031

## **Background Papers**

- Housing Strategy 2020 – 2025 - [Housing Strategy 2020 -2025](#)
- Mid Term Review of the Housing Strategy June 2023 - [HOUSING STRATEGY 2020-2025](#)

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

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