



## Response to the consultation on housing strategies vision and priorities January 2025

## 1. Foreword

1.1 Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to read and respond to our housing survey. We were overwhelmed by the number of responses to our survey on our housing strategies. Thank you for your feedback, and time taken to consider the questions raised. All surveys and comments were individually reviewed to identify common themes and review all points raised. The responses have been collated into key points raised, which we have listed below and responded to.

2.1 A number of you responded that the vision, priorities and survey were not specific or detailed enough, and we hear that more detail is needed. We will take the points submitted as part of this consultation into the development of the full strategies, which we hope will provide the detail you are looking for. These strategies will be reviewed annually, giving you all the opportunity to input further into shaping the delivery of our housing services as we progress on our improvement journey.

## 2. Executive summary

2.1 The Council's last Housing Strategy covered the period 2015-2020, and was adopted in February 2015. The last Homelessness Strategy covered 2018-2020, and was adopted in 2018.

2.2 Following the adoption of a new Corporate Plan in July 2024, we began planning for reviewing our housing strategies. Continuing our previous format, we have been working on developing two new housing strategies, one overarching strategy to cover all housing services, and the second focussing on the statutory homelessness services.

2.3 Through internal review and discussion, we developed two new draft visions and 4 new priorities for each strategy. These were intended to provide the framework for the development of the details within the strategies.

2.4 In December 2024 we opened a survey asking for feedback on our draft visions and priorities for both housing strategies. We asked whether those completing the survey were a resident, worked in the borough, had family/friends in the borough or no connection, so we could best understand who we were reaching through our survey. The survey was open until the end of January 2025.

2.5 We directly notified many local groups and partner organisations that we work closely with about the survey, as well as it being publicised on the Council's website and social media channels.

2.6 We had a total of 590 responses to the survey; the majority of those responding (90.43%) were residents in the borough, 33.43% of which also worked in the borough (57.02% lived in the borough but worked elsewhere). The remainder worked in the borough and had friends/family living here (1.97%) or were responding as no connection to the borough (2.81%).

## 3 Summary of consultation responses and council response

3.1 79.5% agreed or somewhat agreed with our housing vision '*Everyone has a home that meets their needs*'.

3.2 Concerns were raised that:

- **it was too vague and not ambitious.**

*Response:* We will further develop our vision to ensure it is clear, specific, and aspirational. We will provide more concrete objectives and measurable targets in the form of an action plan.

- **We needed to specify the 'needs' we are referring to**

*Response:* We will clarify the specific needs we are addressing in the detail of the strategy, these could for example relate to the size or type of home someone needs, or adaptations for their specific circumstances, or making sure homes are warm and free from damp.

- **We need to qualify who ‘everyone’ is.**

*Response:* Our vision is for all demographic groups, which includes those on low-incomes, families, young people, older people, people with disabilities, and marginalised communities. Some comments mentioned a desire to have this focussed on people from Guildford and we will take this into account as we develop our strategy.

- **We need to balance infrastructure and the environment, not developing at the expense of the greenbelt.**

*Response:* Housing works very closely with the Planning Department to ensure that our approach balances infrastructure growth with environmental preservation, integrating green solutions, high quality design and protecting natural spaces. Our colleagues in the Planning Department have been consulted on the strategy and will be included as it develops. We will work collaboratively on studies for housing that will form part of the Local Plan information gathering and our housing strategy will be aligned and supportive of the new Borough Local Plan.

- **We need to provide for the disabled.**

*Response:* Accessibility and inclusivity are priorities that run through all our services. We work closely with Surrey County Council on the delivery of specialised housing and will include an action point within our strategy that defines the work we are doing in this area.

- **Our visions should be SMART.**

*Response:* We will review our strategy as it develops to align with the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound), and deliver clear objectives, measurable outcomes, and realistic timelines for implementation within an action plan.

- **Housing is a basic human right.**

*Response:* We acknowledge that housing is fundamental, and through our strategy we will reinforce our commitment to ensuring affordable, adequate, and accessible housing for all members of our community.

- **We should separate needs from wants.**

*Response:* We will establish clear criteria within our housing policies to distinguish essential needs from discretionary wants, ensuring that resources are prioritised effectively to address the most pressing issues first. We want residents to be happy in their homes. Adverts for housing specify the facilities available at affordable housing advertised for let, so applicants can see whether there is a driveway or private garden for example and make a choice over expressing interest in properties that meet their needs and wants.

- **Want consideration of trade offs**

*Response:* There are significant trade offs in delivering affordable housing including affordability vs. financial viability, quantity vs. quality, location vs. cost and sustainability vs. affordability. Through our strategies we will set our ambitions for delivery. The requirements will be set out in planning policy and based on a study of the housing market and local factors which

- **Help young people / provide starter homes**

*Response:* Ensuring young people have access to affordable homeownership is a key priority. Rising housing costs have made it increasingly difficult for first-time buyers to get onto the property ladder, and we are committed to addressing this challenge by increasing the supply of homes for sale at a discount to market prices.

- **Importance of infrastructure when delivering new homes**

*Response:* Delivering new homes is not just about building houses; it's about creating thriving, sustainable communities. Through our planning policy, we will ensure that the correct balance of infrastructure is secured when delivering new homes.

- **Shared ownership is not a good or affordable product**

*Response:* We always welcome feedback about the affordable tenures that we deliver and will look at encouraging alternative forms of affordable home ownership.

3.3 88.76% agreed or somewhat agreed with our homelessness vision ' *to provide a high quality, responsive service where we support those rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping at the earliest opportunity*'.

3.4 The following points were raised:

- **We should include safe shelter and guidance.**

*Response:* We will incorporate safe shelter and guidance into our strategy, ensuring that individuals in vulnerable situations receive not only housing but also the necessary support services to rebuild their lives.

- **Ensure clean accommodation and coordinated services that enables people to retain their dignity.**

*Response:* We realise that our services are about more than ensuring people have basic housing provision. We work closely with housing providers and will continue to do so to ensure accommodation is good quality and people are supported to retain their dignity at those times of crisis or difficulty. Furthermore, that there is support to help them back on their feet and secure long term housing security.

- **Value for the Council and affordable housing**

*Response:* We set budgets for delivery of our services which we review regularly. When procuring services, we follow procurement processes that are designed to ensure value for money. As part of our improvement work we are striving to improve our services, reduce costs and simplify delivery.

- **Prioritise children, elderly and servicemen**

*Response:* We will be working on reviewing our allocations policies following the adoption of the strategy. Within this policy we will outline priorities relating to specific groups based on identified needs and existing provision. We will follow all national guidance in the development of our policies. For example, national regulation already provides for veterans of the Regular Armed Forces to be exempt from local connection tests to facilitate their access to social housing.

- **Promote social inclusion**

*Response:* We are committed to ensuring all individuals, regardless of background or circumstance, have equal opportunities to participate in society.

- **Adopt a proactive approach**

*Response:* Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy focuses on early intervention and proactive services through our community organisation partners. We will add an action in our action plan to review this provision to see whether we can make any improvements to the services currently offered.

- **Address the lack of concrete measures**

*Response:* Each strategy will have an action plan with clear, actionable commitments and measurable targets.

- **Incorporate prevention strategies**

*Response:* Through work to review the root causes of cases, we will develop our understanding of current challenges and be best placed to develop any new interventions that are required. Root causes could include, poverty, mental health issues, or the lack of access to education or employment.

- **Strategies should reference mental health, crime, drug misuse, relationship breakdown, holistic approach and multi-agency co-operation**

*Response:* We will ensure that all these areas are represented in our strategies.

- **Don't understand what 'move on' means.**

*Response:* We will review our wording to make sure that this is more clearly explained.

- **Pets can be important support. Consider allowing pets in rented properties.**

*Response:* Our current pets policy provides for pets to be kept within our homes with prior permission (excluding assistance pets which can be kept and does not require specific permission).

- **Pointless survey, we are going to agree with all priorities / You cannot prioritise statutory duties / The consultation was not detailed enough to get actual feedback**

*Response:* Our strategies show that all elements of housing services are important. We hoped through our consultation to identify what was important under these themes so we could develop this further within our strategies. Understanding which areas people felt were priorities would help us to set timescales within our action plans to deliver those areas which were seen as a priority for residents first where possible.

- **A survey consulting on two strategies was not as clear as focusing on one strategy. Questions were leading.**

*Response:* We accept that consulting on the two strategies on one survey may have made this more complicated and we will consider our approach with any future consultations. We appreciate your feedback on the wording of the questions, we want to ensure that our questions are clear and fair. Our goal is to gather accurate information, not to influence responses. The way the questions are structured helps ensure we cover key aspects, and our intent is to gather a full and fair understanding.

- **Make affordable housing actually affordable.**

*Response:* As part of the evidence base for our new Borough Local Plan we will be reviewing affordability and building up to date affordability levels into planning policy. In line with the national approach, we will be encouraging affordable

housing at the lower social rented level where it can be delivered and looking into the feasibility of setting local 'Guildford Rents' based on local affordability.

- **No joined up care for refugees**

*Response:* The council supports all national programmes for the support and placement of refugees. We will continue to engage with any requests to support refugees, and work with our community partners to review the current provision and pathways for refugees coming into our Borough.

- **Avoid 'Buzzword Bingo'**

*Response:* This along with an earlier point about the term 'move on' is a great reminder that we should be making sure our strategies are clear and easy to understand. We'll ask local community groups to work with us to make sure our strategies are understandable.

- **Strategies should include enforcement**

*Response:* We appreciate concerns around enforcement and know that fair and consistent enforcement is important for maintaining standards and public confidence. We also work on prevention, education, and community engagement to reduce the need for enforcement in the first place. As part of our new strategies, we will include a review of our enforcement approach to ensure we are proportionally and legally sound.

- **People need to feel respected and are worthwhile in the work they do.**

*Response:* We appreciate your concern, public service is built on the dedication of those who work tirelessly to support communities. When people feel appreciated in their roles, they are more engaged, motivated, and able to deliver the high-quality services that people rely on. As part of our improvement programme, we will include initiatives to support staff to deliver the best services for our residents.

- **Promote pride in living in a neighbourhood that fosters a happy healthy caring community for all**

*Response:* We work closely with planning on the design of new housing developments to ensure the affordable housing is integrated into the scheme and indistinguishable from the market homes. We work with housing providers to support residents and through wider council services foster happy, inclusive communities.

#### **4 Feedback Word Cloud**

3.5 We copied all the feedback text into a tool to create a word cloud. Word clouds are a visual representation of text data, where words are displayed in different sizes based on their frequency. The more frequently a word appears in feedback, the larger and bolder it appears in the cloud.

3.6 The top fifty words that appeared in the feedback from the strategy is displayed in the word cloud below. Many of the key words are unsurprising, 'housing', 'homes', 'homelessness', 'affordable', 'people' and 'needs'. Other words which come in the top 50 most commonly used words include 'everyone', 'support', 'infrastructure', 'quality' and 'strategy' amongst others.

