

**East Suffolk Housing Strategy 2017- 23**

This is the first joint Housing Strategy for East Suffolk - Suffolk Coastal and Waveney Councils working in partnership. The councils have been working together for a number of years and are now on track to create a new Council in East Suffolk in 2019. This strategy sets out East Suffolk's ambitions and priorities for housing services from 2017 to 2023 to achieve its vision to:

*Maintain and sustainably improve the quality of life for everyone growing up in, living in, working in and visiting East Suffolk.*

**1. The Policy Context**

**National Policy:** Since 2010 the government has significantly reduced the funding to local authorities. There have also been substantial changes to national policy affecting housing and related areas, including:

- **Welfare reforms** that have reduced the benefits available to help pay rent costs
- **Increased focus in housing policy on home ownership**
- **Reduced funding for the development of affordable housing**
- **Changes to council housing tenancies** and changes to **council housing revenue accounts** introduced by the Housing and Planning Act 2016
- Recent **emphasis on tackling the low levels of new house building**, seen as the root cause of **housing shortage** and of **unaffordable housing** nationally
- Renewed focus on the prevention of **single homelessness and rough sleeping** with additional legislation in 2017

**Regional and Local Policy: The New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)**, which promotes economic growth in Norfolk and Suffolk has set ambitious targets for growth in jobs, new businesses and housing, with ambitions to build up to 117,000 homes across the two counties by 2026. This is higher than the homes to be built shown in the Local Plans across Suffolk and Norfolk.

The **Strategic Housing Market Assessments** which inform the **Local Plans** for Suffolk Coastal and Waveney have recently been updated. The evidence from these continues to support the need for significant numbers of additional homes of all types. This growth is focused on the most sustainable towns and villages. Current planning policies in both Suffolk Coastal and Waveney require approximately a third of new homes on sites of over 10 homes to be affordable.

The **East Suffolk Economic Growth Plan 2014- 25** aims for sustainable economic and housing growth. It acknowledges that East Suffolk has significant planned housing growth linked into the provision of jobs, but identifies the likely need for additional housing above the planned targets if its ambitions for economic growth are to be achieved.

## 2. Population, Economy and Housing Challenges

**Population:** East Suffolk is home to 241,000 people and this figure is predicted to increase by 18,700 by 2036. Although there has been population growth in both districts, and further growth is predicted, this has been slowing in recent years. The number of homes needed is increasing faster than the total population. Each year until 2036 the average number of households is predicted to grow by 375 in Waveney and in Suffolk Coastal by 460.

**Economy:** Although the economic climate has been uncertain a very high proportion of the working age population of East Suffolk is in work. There is variation across the area with higher levels of unemployment in Waveney, particularly focused in Lowestoft. Despite high levels of employment many households have experienced difficulties because of the high cost of housing compared to wages. Home ownership has become less accessible, and private developers and housing associations have found it harder to develop new homes. As a result new housing development has not met planned targets and many schemes with planning permission have not been built.

**The Challenges for Housing in East Suffolk:** The main challenges for housing are increasing supply, affordability, homelessness and meeting the **changing needs** of the population:

- The number of homes being built is not keeping pace with demand and an increasing number of households face difficulty in finding an affordable home that meets their needs
- House prices mean that home ownership is out of reach for many people in the area, including young families and newly forming households. This increases the demand for privately rented homes, which is reflected in rising private rental costs, and the high number of people who have applied for social housing.
- The numbers of households on housing waiting lists for affordable housing in the two districts are currently about 4 times the number of homes which become available each year
- Existing homes are often too large for the recent demand from smaller households needing 1 or 2 bedrooms
- Over the last 15 years statutory homelessness acceptances have declined significantly as more households have been helped to find accommodation in the private rented sector. But rising rents and changes to welfare benefits have increasingly made this option unaffordable. There is recent evidence of homelessness pressures increasing, particularly for single vulnerable households
- Most housing demand is in the larger urban settlements, but there remains a small but acute demand for affordable housing in the smaller rural settlements
- The most recent Suffolk-wide gypsy, traveller and travelling showpeople accommodation assessment, completed in October 2013, identified a need for additional pitches in both Waveney and Suffolk Coastal to cover immediate and future need

**Special Needs:** Some groups require specialist housing or support. Work is being undertaken, led by Suffolk County Council, to assess the future need for specialist accommodation across Suffolk. Initial findings show a need for more supported housing for most groups. Needs include:

- **Older people:** There are more over 75's in East Suffolk population and this age group will double by 2039. The strong link between age and worsening health has a significant impact on the suitability of people's housing. There is a need for more housing to be adapted to make it accessible and for more specialist housing for older people, including higher level support for people with severe mobility problems, chronic physical health conditions and dementia.
- **Learning disabilities:** There are 2,000 people with learning disability, formally registered with primary care and Suffolk County Council, many of whom need supported housing. By comparison 695 bedspaces are currently available.
- **Mental health:** additional short and medium term accommodation for people recovering from serious mental ill-health.

### **The Condition of Housing:**

Homes in the private rented sector – particularly Houses in Multiple Occupation are most likely to fail to meet minimum legal standards. Housing association and council homes generally meet decent homes standards and the main issues for social landlords are investment to maintain the stock in good condition and the suitability of the existing housing for changing needs.

Approximately 10% of households in East Suffolk are estimated to be in living in fuel poverty, though this figure nearly doubles in some of the poorest areas. Fuel poverty and cold homes are major contributors to ill health and avoidable winter deaths.

### **3. Our Five Priorities**

**Increasing the Supply of New Housing to meet a Range of Needs** – a more proactive role for East Suffolk supporting the development of affordable homes.

East Suffolk will use a range of strategies, models and partnerships to increase the supply of affordable new homes, including:

- Developing a comprehensive 5 year new affordable housing investment programme
- Agreeing a council-led new HRA housing supply programme
- Working with the planning service to develop a policy for investment of commuted sums in additional affordable homes
- Developing current partnership arrangements with key housing association partners to increase the delivery of new housing supply
- Delivering a specific programme of housing development tailored to the needs of rural communities
- Identifying opportunities to increase new supply with additional partners including for-profit organisations

## **Getting the Most out of Existing Homes and Improving Access to Housing**

In an environment of high demand and pressures on housing supply we need to provide support and help to prevent homelessness, ensure that we allocate homes to those who need them most and make the best use of our existing homes of all tenures. We will:

- Develop a new homelessness prevention strategy
- Ensure that letting policies and procedures remain fit for purpose
- Develop a comprehensive policy to assist under-occupying council tenants to downsize
- Coordinate the delivery of an effective service to support adaptations to people's homes
- Develop an East Suffolk-wide policy on grant assistance to improve poor housing
- Use the council HRA Asset Strategy to ensure the housing stock meets the changing needs of tenants

## **Specialist support and accommodation for groups with special needs**

For groups with special needs East Suffolk will:

- Work in partnership with Suffolk County and District Councils on the Review of Specialist Housing
- Work in partnership to commission advice, support and tenancy sustainment services to help people stay in their homes
- Ensure that specialist housing responds to changing needs and makes best use of resources, for example, by reviewing outdated older persons housing
- Develop an East Suffolk-wide Strategy for Older People's Housing

## **Working in Partnership-Supporting Successful Communities, Regeneration and Economic Development**

We will work in partnership to:

- Pilot an area-based Private Sector Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy to tackle concentrations of poor condition housing in the most deprived areas of Lowestoft
- Deliver the Lowestoft Lake Lothing and Outer Harbour Area Action Plan to regenerate the neighbourhood, including major new housing development
- Respond to the housing and infrastructure growth agenda, with other Suffolk Housing Authorities
- Identify environmental improvements that contribute to wellbeing, with local people, the Active Communities Team and other partners

## **Well-managed and maintained homes – promoting professional standards and value for money**

East Suffolk wants to ensure the professional management and maintenance of housing across all tenures, including the directly managed housing stock. We will do this by:

- Developing an East Suffolk-wide Private Sector Housing Strategy to improve standards in private sector housing
- Tackling fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions through energy efficiency measures in homes of all tenures
- Delivering council HRA Business Plan targets
- Developing Partnership Agreements with Key HA Partners
- Continuing to develop a focused response to impact of Welfare Reform on council tenants and budgets