

Essex County Council Housing Strategy: Draft Consultation Summary Document

Proposed approach, goals and high-level actions for comment, February 2020

Vision and priorities

Housing matters to Essex County Council (ECC). We are signatories to the long-term aspirations for the county set out in the [Vision for Essex](#), that includes the ambition to use the development of new homes over the next 20 years as an opportunity to enhance the county. Building on the things that make Essex a great place to live – our countryside, our coastline, our heritage – and working with local people, businesses and communities.

We have embedded this vision in our [Organisation Strategy](#), making it a priority to facilitate growing, thriving communities, and good quality, environmentally friendly new homes.

Housing goes well beyond new homes in growing communities. It underpins ECC's strategic priorities to enable economic growth, support older people with care needs and other vulnerable groups to live independently, reduce health inequalities and create great places to grow up live and work.

ECC is taking action on climate change as demonstrated by the setting up of the *Essex Climate Change Commission*. We want to promote new ways to reduce carbon emissions from housing and promote Green Infrastructure as part of new housing growth.

We are proposing to develop a Housing Strategy for Essex County Council to outline the actions we will take to achieve our strategic priorities and how we will work with our partners in the wider housing system.

Working with partners

Ensuring the right numbers, types, affordability and quality of housing are provided across Essex relies on the cooperation of partners. Our borough, city and district partners have statutory responsibilities for housing and local plan making, ensuring land is identified for housing in the right places. Housing associations and private developers build homes across the county. Homes England are investing funding, land and expertise to support delivery on behalf of the government. We work together through a wide range of partnerships, including the *Housing Officer Groups* in Essex and South Essex, *Essex Developers Group* and the *South East Local Enterprise Partnership*.

Our role in housing

ECC plays an important part of the housing system in Essex, our roles include:

- Planning, funding and delivering infrastructure to support housing delivery;
- Working with borough, city and district partners and government on proposed garden communities, new settlements and locally led regeneration projects;
- Through Essex Housing as a developer of new open market, specialist and affordable homes on surplus public sector land, helping to meet housing need across the county;
- Coordinating, commissioning and market shaping activity to ensure housing is available for vulnerable people and those with special requirements; and
- Strategic coordination on crosscutting issues e.g. homelessness prevention, improving health and wellbeing, and integration support for resettled refugees.

We have an interest in seeing housing development that:

- Supports economic growth. Housing that attracts investment, and supports new jobs and skills and training opportunities for local communities;
- Protects and improves the environment. Ensuring that new homes and communities mitigate and adapt to climate change, support improved air quality, energy and water efficiency, waste and flood management and are designed to be low carbon; and
- Promotes healthy places. Working with NHS partners on their workforce, estates and infrastructure planning to help bring forward NHS services alongside new development.

Our track record

We have an ambition to do more than the statutory minimum. We stand behind the ambitions of our partners for housing growth and reducing homelessness. We are well recognised as one of the leading county councils in the country on housing issues. Over the last five years we have worked to establish positive relationships with our housing partners and support their wider housing aims. We have invested in strong delivery capability exemplified in Essex Housing and a strategic Housing Growth Team. We have published the award-winning [Essex Design Guide](#) to improve new housing development, including new content on digital, health and wellbeing, the ageing population, and Garden Communities. In 2019 we played a key role in helping to secure over £317m of central government *Housing Infrastructure Fund* investment to benefit existing communities and deliver new infrastructure to enable housing growth in the county.

Our Housing Strategy

Our proposed strategy is an ECC-owned document that closely links to those of our partners and sets out a coherent framework for our engagement with them. It will reinforce our focus on priority localities and identify opportunities for people to live well and independently of social care. It will set challenging goals and create a practical framework to guide action.

We don't have all the answers and the purpose of this document is to share our emerging thinking with our partners and to seek your views, before we develop a detailed action plan.

The goals of the strategy

The strategy will set out the broad housing challenges in Essex, but as an ECC-owned strategy we want to focus on areas where our expertise and resources can generate most value, not duplicate effort.

We propose that the strategy should set out three goals for Essex County Council to achieve: **Growing Essex while protecting the best of the county; Enabling people to live independently throughout their life; and Supporting people to have a stable home.**

We encourage views through this consultation of how ECC could further assist in addressing these and other important housing issues in partnership with the organisations who are leading on this work.

Strategic Goal 1: Growing Essex while protecting the best of the county

Draft Outcomes

ECC will work with our housing partners to support their ambitions for housing, so that over the next 15 years collectively we will see:

- The delivery of new homes which meet **Garden Community** principles across planned new garden communities in Essex
- Every part of Essex has the **policies** and **land supply** in place to deliver the number of **new homes** - including **affordable homes** – expected in line with local aspirations
- Increased investment secured to deliver supporting **infrastructure** that enables sustainable development of *new* communities and meets *existing* communities' needs
- Planning, delivery and maintenance of housing in Essex that helps to realise wider aims including to – transition to a **zero-carbon economy**, create **beautiful homes and places**, and **embed sustainable and active travel**

Background: National government has set out a clear ambition to increase levels of housebuilding with a target set to see an average of 300,000 homes built a year by the mid-2020s. To achieve this ambition the government has introduced the Housing Delivery Test, alongside the five-year housing land supply test, and amended the National Planning Policy Framework to encourage higher levels of housebuilding.

There is a recognition nationally and locally that an increase in the number of homes built needs to be accompanied by an increase in the quality of homes. Improving the energy efficiency and use of renewable energy in existing and new homes will play a crucial role in supporting efforts to address climate change and the legally binding target for the UK to be net zero carbon by 2050.

Local Authorities in Essex are preparing Local Plans to deliver approximately 7,120 additional homes each year up to 2036. These plans represent a higher rate of housing site delivery than previous plans.

Partners across Essex – borough, city and district councils, developers, housing associations - have made progress in increasing delivery over last five years with net annual housing additions more than doubling from 2,900 to 7,300 between 2013/14 and 2018/19 and affordable housing delivery at a seven year high of 1,250 homes in 2018/19. Ensuring that new housing delivery is responsive to local needs and demand for new high quality and low carbon housing will be key to enabling the people and places of Essex to flourish.

ECC recognise the need for new housing in Essex and want to see housebuilding that keeps pace with population growth and consistent with the delivery of targets outlined in Local Plans. We recognise that more homes will generate increased revenue through council tax that will help to support the delivery of public services in Essex. We want to see new homes built that are digitally connected as part of places that deliver the right employment opportunities for existing and new residents, allowing businesses to expand and attracting new investment into our county. We want to maximise the opportunity for local people to gain the skills and experience to help build the planned new homes. We want to secure sufficient funding to deliver necessary infrastructure at an early stage in the development process, reducing pressure on existing infrastructure and unlocking the delivery of housing

sites. We aim for growing places and the delivery of new homes in Essex in ways that support our ambition for greater use of public transport, cycling and walking to tackle congestion, improve health and wellbeing and unlock wider environmental and social benefits. We recognise that bringing empty homes back into use can increase supply and improve the local environment. The establishment of new settlements in line with Garden Community principles is a key route to achieving many of the above outcomes and ECC are actively supporting work on the proposed garden communities across Essex.

Strategic Goal 2: Enabling people to live independently throughout their life

Draft Outcomes

ECC want to work with our housing partners to support their ambitions for housing, so that over the next 15 years collectively we will see:

- An increase in the availability of well located, well designed mainstream housing that is flexible to people's changing needs and enables more Essex residents to **remain in their homes and live independent and healthy lives for longer**
- ECC service users who require it are able to access **high quality specialist and supported accommodation**
- **Adaptation and digital technologies** widely adopted through co-design with residents to support people to live independently and healthily for longer and allow people to remain in their home

Background: Housing, health and social care are intrinsically linked. Housing plays a vital role in the prevention, reduction, or delay of adult social care need. The government has committed to working to develop a cross party consensus on social care that will consider housing as a part of broader reforms to funding, care and support.

ECC will take a stronger role in influencing the market to ensure that more housebuilders and developers are providing homes, that promote independent living and healthy lives over the long term.

The fastest growing population in Essex is people aged over 85. We are committed to enabling older people to live independently. To support our ambitions, we are diversifying the housing offer for older people, to bring forward a programme of more appropriate housing with care available on site. The development programme of ECC's direct delivery capacity through Essex Housing continues to provide an important element of meeting specialist housing need.

We want good quality housing with care for vulnerable groups, including (but not limited to) adults with disabilities, people with mental health needs, physical and sensory impairments, people with dementia, care leavers and young adults with special educational needs and disabilities to prevent the use of inappropriate accommodation. We will provide forecasts of projected need for specialist housing and work to ensure that we are creating properly designed groups of units in the right places to meet demand by working with partners, the market and through the planning process.

We know to achieve our goals we will need rely on the availability of a workforce with the right skills to provide care and support for our older and vulnerable residents. We want to

work with partners to investigate ways that the housing offer in Essex can help to ensure we are able to attract and retain workers especially in localities where there may be shortages.

Strategic Goal 3: Supporting people to have a stable home

Draft Outcomes

ECC want to work with our housing partners to support their ambitions for housing, so that over the next 15 years collectively we will see:

- Partnership working to **end the need for people to sleep rough in Essex**, in line with the government's national ambitions; and
- A whole-system focus on **homeless prevention** to stem the use of inappropriate **temporary accommodation** and end B&B and hotel use.

Background: The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has introduced new duties for local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness. The government has introduced new funding to prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping. The government has produced a [Rough Sleeping Strategy](#), introduced a target to end rough sleeping by 2024, and set up the *Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Reduction Taskforce* to advise and oversee progress.

The rise of the private rented sector, changes to benefit rules and a lack of social housing are putting a strain on the housing system in Essex. Use of temporary accommodation has risen by 31% in the three years to 2017/18 and placements of homeless people into Essex from London and Hertfordshire are growing. The latest available figures estimate a total of 67 people to be sleeping rough across Essex with concentrations in our built-up urban areas.

The public sector has come together to work jointly to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in Essex, and to respond to increasing deprivation. ECC is in the process of commissioning an updated seven-year contract providing support for vulnerable people who are homeless and living in particular temporary accommodation. We want to build on successes such as the Homelessness Trailblazer project and the Essex Floating Support Service that have provided advice and support to people when they are under threat of losing their home to reduce homelessness in the county.

The private rented sector provides a diverse range of accommodation and plays an important role in the Essex housing market. However, over the last ten years the ending of tenancies by private rented landlords has risen to become the number one cause of homelessness in the county. We want to work with our housing partners to investigate ways that we can ensure households in private rented homes benefit from good quality, stable and affordable accommodation.

Delivery and action plan

We will develop a detailed plan setting out the actions that ECC will take individually and with partners to help realise our housing strategy goals. Once adopted the final strategy action plan will present the clear measurable activity that ECC will take to achieve our strategic goals with milestones set for the short (1-5 years), medium (5+) and long term (15+ years). The final action plan will clearly highlight the role ECC will play in delivery – whether that is in a lead role, where we have shared responsibility as part of a partnership, or where we are supporting partners to help achieve outcomes. We also propose to summarise the high-level

actions ECC will take in different localities in the county. We are proposing that the ECC housing strategy will be a five-year document with regular reviews of the action plan to ensure it remains relevant and up to date.

An indicative high-level draft action plan is set out in **Appendix 1** below. We will use feedback we receive from the consultation responses to inform development of our final action plan. In recognition that many of the actions are cross-cutting and support progress towards more than one of our strategic goals we have presented activity in the draft action plan according to three levels of intervention – **Better Places** (*housing planned and delivered in ways that creates great places*); **Better Homes** (*influencing the type, quality and design of individual properties*); **Better Support** (*ensuring the right support to enable people to live well in appropriate homes*).

In addition, we have identified four themes that will underpin the development and successful delivery of the strategy:

- **Building our knowledge** a focus on generating and using quality data, research and evaluation to inform decision making
- **Building the system** Strengthening our partnerships within the Essex housing system; with other public sector organisations, with the market and with central government
- **Deliver value for residents** promoting opportunities for reducing costs for ECC and other partners
- **Technology and Innovation** exploring ways to embed new technologies and ideas to realise our strategic goals

A schematic representation of the elements of the draft strategy is included as **Appendix 2**.

Feedback

We are seeking views on our proposed approach and would like your response to the following questions:

- Do you think that the three strategic goals outlined in the strategy – **Growing Essex while protecting the best of the county**; **Enabling people to live independently throughout their life**; and **Supporting people to have a stable home** – are the right ones to focus on? If not, which ones should be included?
- Are the draft outcomes for each strategic goal the best way to set the right level of ambition and measure progress?
- Have we identified the right areas of activity in the draft high-level action plan? Is anything missing?
- What are the three top actions that ECC could take to support housing across Essex?
- What are the opportunities for collaborative working to achieve these ambitions?

We want to hear from everyone involved in the housing system across Essex to help us answer these questions. The feedback we receive from our partners is a vital part of refining the areas of focus. Based on responses, we will develop a final strategy and action plan that sets out the steps we will take with partners to make progress towards the goals in this document. **We will publish a full strategy and action plan in 2020.**

To submit your comments please go to <https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/> (page not yet live)
Please get in touch if you would like to discuss further at: ---@essex.gov.uk

Appendix 1 Draft high-level action plan

	Strategic Goal 1: <i>Growing Essex</i>	Strategic Goal 2: <i>Live Independently</i>	Strategic Goal 3: <i>Stable home</i>
Better Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To support the development of Essex <u>Local Plans</u> ▪ Bring in funds for <u>infrastructure</u> to unlock housing and economic sites ▪ Support housing growth that embeds greater use of <u>sustainable modes of transport</u> ▪ Promote development that supports achievement of the <u>Green Essex Strategy</u> ▪ Support the development of new settlements on <u>garden community</u> and <u>healthy new town</u> principles ▪ Play a partnership role in locally-led <u>regeneration</u> of deprived communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development of new settlements on <u>garden community</u> and <u>healthy new town</u> principles 	
Better Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with & support partners to deliver more <u>Affordable Homes</u> ▪ Collaborate to more quickly transition new & existing properties to <u>Zero Carbon</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop/commission <u>specialist housing</u> to meet the needs of ECC service users – children and adults ▪ Encourage the use of <u>new technologies and adaptations</u> to support people to live independently and healthily ▪ Work with the market to encourage the development of accessible <u>homes that promote independent and healthy living</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with & support partners to deliver more <u>Affordable Homes</u> ▪ Work with partners to support homeless prevention activity and reduce the use of inappropriate <u>Temporary Accommodation</u> in Essex
Better Support		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investigate ways that housing provision can help ensure adequate <u>workforce capacity</u> to deliver housing related care and support ▪ <u>Integrate and support refugees</u> resettled in Essex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work in partnership to develop, seek external funding and support delivery of <u>Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Initiatives</u> ▪ Ongoing evaluation and continuing improvement of ECC's contracts providing support to homeless people and helping prevent homelessness ▪ Deliver existing and grow use of <u>Protocols</u> to improve partnership approach to homelessness prevention ▪ Investigate ways that housing provision can help ensure adequate <u>workforce capacity</u> to deliver housing related care and support

Appendix 2 Draft ECC Housing Strategy Framework

