



Chelmsford City Council Cabinet

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Tenancy Strategy 2024-2029

Report by: Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford

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Purpose

To seek approval to externally consult on an updated draft Tenancy Strategy 2024-2029. Chelmsford City Council's previous Tenancy Strategy was published in 2018 and is now due for review and replacement during 2024.

Options

1. Approve the Tenancy Strategy, as presented, for consultation.
2. Approve the Tenancy Strategy, with amendments, for consultation.
3. Decline to approve the Tenancy Strategy for consultation

Recommendations

1. The Tenancy Strategy, as presented, be approved for consultation.
 2. Following the consultation The Director of Sustainable Communities be authorised in consultation with the Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford to make, if required, minor amendments and approve the Tenancy Strategy.
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1. Background

- 1.1 Chelmsford City Council's previous Tenancy Strategy was published in 2018, it is now due for review and replacement. The purpose of the Strategy is to support Registered Providers (RPs) who are developing and managing homes in the district to understand the local housing need and reflect the Council's Strategic Housing priorities within their own policies.
- 1.2 The refreshed Strategy reflects the changing housing market conditions and re-establishes the Council's expectations of Registered Providers operating in the district.
- 1.3 Refreshing the Strategy will enable the Council to revitalise conversations with Registered Providers about the challenges and opportunities to create joint solutions through partnership and collaboration.

2. Context

- 2.1 Social and affordable housing in Chelmsford is in high demand, and there are far more people on the Register than there are homes available. There are currently 1300 households on the Register. At the time of writing this report 118 households have been successfully rehoused from the register this financial year.
- 2.2 Housing demand and homelessness in the longer term is difficult to predict as it is driven by a complex range of social, economic, and external factors, as well as changes to national legislation and policy. The availability of housing in Chelmsford has been significantly impacted by the housing market conditions including the extended differentials between housing costs and average incomes, the availability of homes in the private rented sector, and reductions in turnover in social and affordable housing as the housing market stagnates. The impact of increased interest rates and lack of certainty is slowing down the housing market further and reducing opportunities for people to move.
- 2.3 It is imperative as a non-stock holding authority that the Council clearly articulates its challenges and priorities to Registered Providers delivering the management of social and affordable homes.
- 2.4 The Tenancy Strategy is an opportunity to look at wider issues, such as ways of preventing homelessness and meeting housing need through:
 - Addressing key causes of homelessness such as domestic abuse and friends and family relationship breakdown
 - Creating a focus on sustaining tenancies,
 - Ensuring the best use of existing housing through downsizing schemes,
 - Policy application to remove barriers to access such as rent in advance, adaptations.
 - Improving housing supply.

3.0 Draft Tenancy Strategy

- 3.1 The Tenancy Strategy is a requirement of the Localism Act 2011, which introduced several changes to the way Local Authorities manage and allocate social housing. The Act sought ways to improve the supply of housing by removing the duty on Council's and Housing Associations as Registered Providers of social housing to provide the most secure tenure.
- 3.2 The draft Tenancy Strategy, attached at appendix 1, provides an up to date assessment of the housing market and the level of housing need based on the Strategic Housing Needs Assessment (SHNA) published in October 2023. This translated into a statement of what types of housing is needed to provide a strategic overview for new housing development.
- 3.3 The draft Tenancy Strategy addresses tenancy security to balance the desire for secure tenancies with the need to make the best use of housing stock due to the exceptionally high demand, and it provides guidance and sets out the Council's expectations in relation to the management of existing homes; the aim is to sustain existing tenancies, prevent homelessness and make the best use of their existing housing stock.
- 3.4 A specific 'ask' of the Tenancy Strategy is to work in partnership with the Council and partner agencies to tackle homelessness resulting from domestic abuse as this is a significant cause of homelessness in Chelmsford.

4.0 Consultation Process

- 4.1 Following Cabinet Approval of the draft Tenancy Strategy a formal consultation process will be undertaken with the Registered Providers operating in the Chelmsford district.
- 4.2 The Tenancy Strategy will be shared with Registered Providers (identified in Appendix Two) and feedback requested, the consultation will be open for 6 weeks.
- 4.3 Following the consultation if any significant amendments are needed to be made to the strategy it will be brought back to Cabinet for approval. If no amendments are required or amendments are minor, it is recommended that the Director of Sustainable Communities be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford, to approve the Tenancy Strategy.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The demand for social and affordable housing is increasing as is the number of people approaching the Council for advice and assistance due to homelessness or the threat of homelessness.
- 5.2 Adoption of an updated Tenancy Strategy will enable the Council to reiterate and refresh conversations with Registered Providers about the challenges in Chelmsford through refreshed up to date housing market and housing needs assessment and the clarity of expectation.

List of appendices:

Appendix 1 Draft Tenancy Strategy 2024-2029

Appendix 2 Registered Providers Operating in Chelmsford

Background papers:

None

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional: This strategy falls within the remit of Cabinet to approve.

Financial: None.

Potential impact on climate change and the environment: None

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030: None

Personnel: None

Risk Management: None

Equality and Diversity: An Equality Impact Assessment is in development

Health and Safety: None

Digital: None

Other: None

Consultees:

None

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

Chelmsford Housing Strategy 2022-2027

Homelessness & Rough Sleepers Strategy 2020-2024

DRAFT Tenancy Strategy 2024 – 2029

1.0 Introduction

This is an update of the 2018 Tenancy Strategy to reflect the changing housing market conditions and re-establish the Council's expectations of Registered Providers operating in the district. In February 2022 the City Council made a declaration that Chelmsford is facing a housing crisis. Significant progress has been made preventing homelessness and tackling rough sleeping, however the housing market conditions mean:

- An ever-growing number of Chelmsford residents are unable to afford to buy or rent privately a home which meets their needs creating additional need for affordable homes.
- In 2022/23 there were 1155 homelessness enquiries, a 25% increase on previous years
- In October 2023 there were 474 households in temporary accommodation, 196 of whom are waiting for permanent accommodation
- Despite increasing the number of affordable homes the overall supply / lettings has fallen to its lowest level in 2023/24

Homelessness reflects the wider housing market conditions, specifically the supply and affordability of housing in Chelmsford. The Council's Corporate Plan '*Our Chelmsford, Our Plan*' sets out priorities to help create a greener, fairer, and more connected place.

A key priority is to help tackle local housing needs so everyone can aspire to having a home that they can afford, and which help address the causes of, and mitigate the impacts of, homelessness.

The focus and priority are further developed in the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness & Rough Sleepers Strategy, which are both being refreshed to reflect the changing housing market conditions.

2.0 Aims of the Strategy refresh.

A key outcome of the refresh of the Tenancy Strategy is to revitalise the conversations with Registered Providers about the challenges and create joint solutions through partnership and collaboration. As a stock transfer Housing Authority we recognise the importance of developing and maintaining close working relationships with all Registered Providers and facilitating regular dialogue.

Under the Regulatory Framework for Registered Providers, they are required to consider the aims of this strategy when developing their own policies and plans for developing and managing affordable housing in the area.

For those developing new affordable homes, the Tenancy Strategy may be referred to in Section 106 Agreements. For those owning and managing affordable homes, this Strategy should help them in the following ways:

- Understanding the local circumstances in which their organisation operates and how their business decisions will affect the local community.

- Understanding the profile and need that is reflected by those in housing need, applying for housing and living in affordable housing locally.
- Improve the ability to target resources and housing stock to meet those in greatest need and local priorities.
- Support the longer-term needs and aspirations of tenants of affordable housing, including those who may want to move on into more specialist housing or homeownership, as well as those who may want help to access training and employment.

This strategy will not affect or replace any existing agreements but should be referred to when policies and agreements between the Council and Registered Providers are reviewed. It will also be referred to when considering the development of new affordable housing.

3.0 The Legal Framework

The Localism Act introduced several changes to the way Local Housing Authorities manage and allocate social housing. In particular, the Act sought to improve supply of housing by removing the duty of Council's and Housing Associations as Registered Providers of social housing (RPs) to provide the most secure tenure possible.

This is based upon the knowledge that the greatest proportion of homes being available to offer each year will always come from the turnover of existing stock, and over time, what was a suitable housing option for a family when first housed may no longer be so. At a time when the need for affordable housing is so great, the government wanted to make clear that any offer of housing would be seen as something that could be reviewed at a later stage.

Legislation now requires RPs to let homes for at least two years, but for the majority the minimum should be at least five years for 'general needs' housing. The Act also introduced greater discretion for Local Housing Authorities in developing their policies for allocating housing. Despite reducing the number of households who now qualify for applying to the Housing Register, from over 3,000 to around 1,000, need still exceeds supply even for the most urgent cases.

The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing requires RPs to publish clear and accessible policies that outline their approach to tenancy management, including interventions to sustain tenancies, prevent unnecessary evictions, and tackle tenancy fraud. Referring to the relevant Tenancy Strategy will help ensure that these policies are proportionate to housing in the area and complement the aims of the Council in meeting housing need.

The Localism Act 2011 sets out the legal requirements for local housing authorities producing tenancy strategies; the Strategy must include guidance for Registered Providers operating in the district regarding:

- The kinds of tenancies they will grant.
- The circumstances when they should grant tenancies of a particular kind.
- The length of time fixed term tenancies should be granted for; and
- What is expected from them when ending a fixed term tenancy.
- It must relate to other existing and future policies and strategies (such as the Council's Allocations Policy and Homelessness & Rough Sleepers Strategy which are now also under review) and make sure that both are easily accessible.

All tenancy strategies are to be kept under review and replaced or refreshed every 5 years. Chelmsford City Council's previous Tenancy Strategy was published in 2018 so it is now due for review and replacement during 2024.

Before finally adopting the Tenancy Strategy, or replacing it, local housing authorities must consult with every Registered Provider in their district and give them a reasonable opportunity to comment before a final version is adopted.

A list of all the Registered Providers who have been engaged with in the development of this Strategy can be found in Appendix One.

4.0 Chelmsford's Housing Market

In October 2023 a new Strategic Housing Needs Assessment (SHNA) for Chelmsford City Council was published, which focusses on overall housing need, and affordable housing in the context of changing Government policy and the needs of specific groups such as older people.

ONS dwelling stock data indicates there were 78,700 dwellings in the City Council area as of 2021, a net increase of 7,500 dwellings between 2011 and 2021. Rates of change in dwelling numbers have been more than that seen in other areas, and particularly the last 4-5 years.

Levels of overcrowding are relatively low but rising within the rented sector; the reduction in lettings in social housing in Chelmsford means that there are now fewer homes available, a growing backlog of households in temporary accommodation and very little opportunity to resolve cases of over-crowding.

Despite meeting our targets for the development of new affordable homes in Chelmsford we have seen a continuous reduction in the overall number of lettings over the last decade, reflecting the national situation where this reduction has been nearly 40% from 396,000 in 2013/14 to 252,000 in 2022/23. Consequently, we must work with Registered Providers to reduce if not reverse this decline in supply.

This creates a different and more challenging context for the renewed Tenancy Strategy compared with previous versions, focusing on how a declining supply can be best used to meet a growing need?

5.0 Housing Need

For this Tenancy Strategy, it is helpful to give some background and an outline of the number and type of homes that are most needed. Until recently many local housing authorities including Chelmsford City Council relied upon the private rented sector to supplement the supply of social housing to help meet local housing need.

The SHNA published in October 2023, outlines the future mix of housing required which takes account of demographic change, including potential changes to the number of family households and the ageing of the population.

There are a range of factors which will influence demand for different sizes of homes, including demographic changes; future growth in real earnings and households' ability to save; economic performance and housing affordability. The analysis linked to future demographic change concludes that the following represents an appropriate mix of affordable and market homes, this takes account of both household changes and the ageing of the population.

In all sectors the analysis points to a particular need for 2-bedroom accommodation, with varying proportions of 1-bedroom and 3+-bedroom homes. For rented affordable housing there is a clear need for a range of different sizes of homes, including 40% of general needs housing to have at least 3-bedrooms.

The recommended mix is set out below:

Table 1: Suggested size mix of housing by affordable tenure.

	Affordable home ownership	Rented Affordable General needs
1 bed	25%	25%
2 bed	45%	35%
3 bed	25%	45%
4+ bed	5%	10%

The table below shows the number of lettings from April to December 2023 along with the average supply over the last five years:

Table 2: Supply and need for affordable rent homes

	Apr-Dec 2023	Average annual supply	SHNA Gross annual need
1 bed	72	108	280
2 bed	62	135	323
3 bed	26	54	211
4+ bed	12	3	43
Total	172	300	857

The strategic conclusions in the Strategic Housing Need Assessment recognise the role which delivery of larger family homes can play in releasing a supply of smaller properties for other households. Also recognised is the limited flexibility which 1-bedroom properties offer to changing household circumstances, which feed through into higher turnover and management issues.

The gross annual need takes into account the needs of those who are overcrowded and in housing need for reasons over than homelessness.

In December 2023 there were 475 households in temporary accommodation, highlighting the gap between the need and supply of affordable housing for even the most urgent housing need. In most cases these will be people and families to whom the Council has a statutory duty to secure accommodation for and will therefore be a priority for securing settled accommodation.

There is a growing likelihood that for many, the only affordable option may be in social housing, although we shall continue to try and expand options to make better use of the private rented sector. In October 2023 there were 1,300 households in the Housing Register, following a review restricting eligibility. Many of these are at risk of becoming homeless and the majority have very little expectation of having their housing needs met.

Homelessness demand in the longer term is difficult to predict as it is driven by a complex range of social, economic, and external factors, as well as changes to national legislation and policy. The rate of

growth in the need for affordable homes has for some time exceeded supply, hence the growth in the need for temporary accommodation. Local Housing Authorities throughout England must now consider the risk of exhausting the supply of temporary accommodation too and the consequences of this on homeless families.

6.0 What Type of Housing is Needed?

6.1 Tenure

The need identified in the SHNA for 623 affordable homes a year is extremely challenging in the current circumstances but it highlights the importance of making the very best use of all available stock in the affordable sector.

6.1.1 Affordable Rent or Social Rent

The analysis suggests there will be a need for both social and affordable rented housing – the latter will be suitable particularly for households who are close to being able to afford to rent privately and possibly also for some households who claim full Housing Benefit. It is however clear that social rents are more affordable and could benefit a wider range of households – social rents could therefore be prioritised where delivery does not prejudice the overall delivery of affordable homes. The increasing number of people living in temporary accommodation also points to the need for social rented housing ahead of other tenures.

It is therefore the Council's preference to see social rent rather than affordable rent where this is an option but we would also seek to enable affordable rent where the alternative would be less affordable to those in urgent need or a reduction in the affordable homes on a new development.

6.1.2 Introductory/Starter Tenancies

These have been used by providers in the area. In theory they can be helpful for landlords assessing the longer-term suitability of a tenant, and the possibility that circumstances could change during the first year.

We would want to know that this flexibility and willingness to use introductory or starter tenancies is backed up by a willingness to consider a wider range of possible tenants, including in those who may be more vulnerable, in need of support. Many people the Council has a duty to secure accommodation for may have experienced problems other than homelessness and will be anxious about the prospect of a tenancy that is only for a limited period. However, we understand the concerns of landlords and the need to work closely to help people move on into a more secure tenancy where possible.

We would like to see this as an area where flexibility in the policies of providers is used to help meet as wide a range of people in housing need as possible. Flexibility in the application of policies such as Rent in Advance is critical in supporting vulnerable people access tenancy's and consideration of options to support tenants in hardship and on limited income and welfare benefits is critical to remove barriers to secure homes.

In many cases households will have spent some time in temporary accommodation and the Housing Service will seek to provide help and support to providers as well as to tenants making the transition to

settled accommodation especially where this will help prevent the risk of homelessness. Whilst we understand the concern landlords may have about those who have become homeless we believe that time spent in temporary accommodation can be helpful identifying any concerns about becoming a tenant and we would like to see how we can work together to prepare people ready for move-on.

We would also like to understand ways in which those housed under an introductory tenancy can be reviewed before this is converted into an assured tenancy to make sure this is the most suitable option.

6.1.3 Fixed Term Tenancies

Fixed term tenancies can play an important purpose in helping to achieve the best possible supply of affordable housing. We expect that in many cases the offer of a fixed term tenancy may follow on from the successful completion of an Introductory Tenancy. The fixed term would be for a minimum period of five years on the basis that the household has demonstrated that they are responsible, able to manage a tenancy for that property, which is suitable for their need, and want and need to remain in settled accommodation.

Although the minimum period for a fixed term tenancy is two years, we would expect this only to be offered in exceptional circumstances, explaining to the tenant the reasons for this and if a household nominated by the Council, consulting with the Council before making this decision.

The Council does see that in a small number of cases, for example where it is probable that the need or eligibility of a household may change in the near future, a shorter period of fixed term tenancy could be more appropriate.

We would expect Registered Providers to begin the process of reviewing fixed term tenancies at a stage where there is a reasonable time for tenants to prepare and make other arrangements should there be a possibility that the tenancy will not be renewed. This should begin six months in advance of the possible termination date to give the same length of time that would be the case if they were renting from a private landlord.

In addition to the usual grounds for eviction, we expect that RPs may also consider not renewing a fixed term tenancy where:

- There has been a significant improvement in household income, and it is reasonable to expect that suitable accommodation can now be afforded locally to buy or rent.
- There has been a change in the household and there is now under- or overcrowding and it is no longer reasonable for them to remain in the property.
- The home was allocated to meet a particular need which no longer exists.

As with starter tenancies, we would like to work more closely with Registered Providers to make sure the best use is made of the housing stock in Chelmsford.

6.1.4 Intermediate Affordable Homes

Intermediate affordable homes may be helpful meeting the demand from some who can't or won't want to pay full market housing costs but this should not be provided as an alternative to the significant need (as opposed to demand) for social and affordable rented housing. The SHNA states:

“It is considered that the provision of affordable home ownership should be more explicitly focused on delivering smaller family housing for younger households. Based on this analysis, it is suggested that the following mix of affordable home ownership would be appropriate (although it is recognised that analysis did not definitively show a need for this tenure of housing)” para 5.35

In the same section as a Key Message the SHNA also says: *“In some areas Registered Providers find difficulties selling 1-bedroom affordable home ownership (AHO) homes and therefore the 1-bedroom elements of AHO might be better provided as 2-bedroom accommodation. That said, this report also highlighted potential difficulties in making (larger) AHO genuinely affordable.”*

The NPPF indicates that 10% of all new homes on larger sites should be for affordable home ownership but it does provide some examples of where the 10% might not be required (paragraph 65), if this would ‘significantly prejudice the ability to meet the identified affordable housing needs of specific groups’. In Chelmsford, the clear need for additional rented housing would arguably mean that providing the affordable home ownership would ‘prejudice the ability’ to meet the needs of the ‘specific group’ requiring affordable rented accommodation.

First Homes as a form of affordable home ownership has largely replaced shared-ownership since introduced a few years ago. We understand how shared-ownership may not have had an impact on meeting most, if any, of the Council’s housing duties but could help improve the financial viability for Registered Providers. We are therefore interested in understanding how we can identify and enable a form of intermediate affordable homes that provide the optimum outcome to meet local housing need and encourage development for Registered Providers.

6.2 Property size

There is a considerable shortfall in the local supply of larger affordable family homes. Although there is a considerable need for all size homes from 1- to 4-bed, a higher proportion of larger homes would contribute to the supply of smaller homes where this helps meeting the needs of families who are overcrowded.

Numerically the shortfall in annual supply of 4-bed homes is less than other sizes but the annual average supply is only 7% of identified need. Even a small increase as additional supply, including from the existing stock, could make a much greater improvement than the same number of additional homes of a smaller size.

The Council awards additional priority for overcrowding where families lack two or more bedrooms, this means that whilst 2-bedroom homes may help some who are overcrowded in 1-bedroom homes it is the need for 3-bedroom homes that help those who are suffering most due to overcrowding and have a higher level of priority.

Through this strategy the Council needs to work with Registered Providers to create a better supply from existing housing stock (re-lets and transfers) as well as new-build to increase the overall supply.

In referring to bedroom size it is essential that as many bedrooms are large enough for either two adults sharing or two children, a 3-bedroom home with one double-bedroom and two single bedrooms is of no strategic value.

The Council will be considering further amendments to its Allocation Policy including removing the age restriction on siblings and relatives of the same gender sharing bedrooms as this would help reduce the

number of households needing the largest homes and through the consultation on this strategy, we welcome feedback from Registered Providers on this.

6.3 Development of new homes

Where it is a policy requirement for new development to meet the need for affordable homes, it will be expected that the Council will have 100% nomination rights for all new rented homes, and no less than 75% nomination rights for the relets of these homes.

In the case of intermediate affordable homes this will be determined through negotiation between the Council, the Registered Provider, and any other relevant parties.

6.3.1 Local Lettings Plans

The Council recognises that at times Registered Providers may need to impose additional criteria for the selection of applicants nominated by the Council, because of issues that are unique to a particular location or scheme. Where this is requested for general needs rented homes this should be exceptional with justified need and time-limited, for example to allow improvements to be made to an area. In other cases, this may be because the homes are part of a scheme that includes housing for vulnerable residents, in which case the criteria may continue for as long as the homes continue to be allocated to meet this need. Requests for a Local Lettings Plan should be made prior to homes being advertised and will not be considered once the process for nominations has started. All requests must include both the reason for needing additional criteria to be applied and also clear details of what is being asked for and/or details of factors that will give preference to particular applicants. Registered Providers must give clear and precise information on the criteria that is to be applied and must also ensure that an Equality Impact Assessment has been completed to identify any adverse impacts.

A Local Lettings Plan must be agreed by the relevant manager of the Council's Strategic Housing Service before it can be implemented and we would expect some discussion with the Registered Provider in advance of this stage to help us understand the need and other options. If the Council is unable to provide a nomination that is acceptable, the Registered Provider should consult with the Council before taking any further action to see if the criteria can be amended and the property then advertised once more.

Local Lettings Plans may also be applied to schemes which are intended to give priority to people from a particular area, such as village or parish. In these cases, this should be included as part of the agreement for the development of the scheme. The plans will be referenced and recorded through the Planning process and the allocation policy for these homes will reflect what has been agreed as part of the Planning process. Where schemes are developed to meet or give priority to applicants from a particular village or parish, Registered Providers are strongly encouraged to include a cascade that would still allow applicants from outside this area to be considered, even with reduced entitlement.

7. Management of existing homes.

The Council supports and encourages Registered Providers to actively manage~~ment~~ its relationship with tenants to actively contribute to the prevention of homelessness, the expectation is that no tenant is made homeless where the Council would then owe a statutory duty to rehouse.

The Council will work with the Registered Providers to deliver advice and assistance to prevent homelessness, including targeted prevention to the groups of people who have a greater propensity to become homeless.

7.1 Domestic Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 supported by statutory guidance introduced a broad definition of domestic abuse setting out that domestic abuse can take any forms including economic abuse and controlling and coercive behaviour. There is a positive recognition of the need for a whole system response to supporting victims and survivors. The guidance recognises the complexity of abuse and needs to be properly understood to support a coherent multiagency response.

The Act requires anyone in social housing who becomes homeless as a result of domestic abuse to be provided with a like-for-like replacement home of the same size, tenure and protected rights in a location that is suitable.

In 2022/23 the Council received 178 cases of homelessness applications caused by domestic abuse – more than 50% of that year's affordable housing supply. Whilst it may not always be reasonable to prevent homelessness in many of these cases we believe more could be done to exclude the perpetrator as a way to prevent homelessness. If it is necessary for the family to leave the home they will inevitably need to move into temporary accommodation and we would like to see them return to their landlord as soon as a suitable property becomes available elsewhere in Chelmsford. We understand why it may be harder to arrange a transfer when supply is reducing but we think in some cases, even if temporary accommodation is needed as an interim, this would be quicker and better for families than relying solely on the Council's homelessness duties and it also shows compliance with the Domestic Abuse Act.

We would also support action being taken against perpetrators where this may be a breach of their tenancy agreement as it helps create more options for those who are at risk of becoming homeless.

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) expects all Registered Providers to publish a standalone domestic abuse policy which establishes support mechanisms for people experiencing domestic abuse to remain in their own home, where safe to do so, or have a planned move which does not have a detrimental impact on their security of tenure. The Council would expect that Registered Providers share their policy and operational approaches and work in partnership to prevent victims becoming homeless and provide a named contact for Domestic Abuse casework.

To reduce the number of people presenting as homeless from social housing tenancies where the tenants are no longer willing to accommodate, RPs are expected to work with families to ensure where planned moves are explored in all cases where there are no safeguarding concerns prior to homelessness applications being made.

7.2 Tenancy Failure

In 2022/23 121 households presented as homeless to Chelmsford were from social landlords, and from April 2023 – December 2023 73 households presented from social landlords. The expectation is that RP's actively work with tenants to sustain tenancies or deliver planned moves to prevent

homelessness. Any eviction process should be predicated with a discussion and homelessness assessment to ensure there is no statutory duty to rehouse.

The Council has a Tenancy Sustainment Officer, originally intended to give support to those in the private rented sector, this role has increasingly been involved with helping tenants of Registered Providers. We do not think there is duplication in most of this work but as demand continues to grow we need to be able to make sure that we are working closely and effectively with Registered Providers preparing people for becoming tenants whilst in temporary accommodation and avoiding the risk of repeat homelessness once they move on. We welcome any suggestions as to how we can make best use of our shared resources.

8. Best use of existing housing stock.

8.1 Better Supply

We see three ways in which we would like to work with local Registered Providers:

1. Additional development
2. Refurbishment / Redevelopment
3. Downsizing

8.1.1 Additional development

Conventional delivery through s106 agreements is reliant on local housing market conditions and can be affected by variable conditions that affect financial viability. Any other development including the intensification of existing sites, acquisition of existing properties to convert from market to affordable housing or development on exception sites helps supplement the planned supply of new homes.

8.1.2 Refurbishment / Redevelopment

Some existing housing stock may no longer be financially viable or sustainable. In the past this may have been disposed of but the Council and we hope Registered Providers will now want to consider all reasonable options to avoid any further reduction in local supply. This may mean investing more than usual in bringing homes back into use, or redeveloping the site (in some cases for a larger number of homes). It could also include conversion of tenure, for example from intermediate to affordable rent.

8.1.3 Downsizing

We know that a considerable number of affordable homes in Chelmsford are under-occupied, in many cases tenants will be reluctant to leave a home and sometimes may face other barriers that makes this easier said than done. With such a small supply of larger homes, even a small number of moves makes a significant improvement to the supply of 3- and 4-bedroom homes. People often associate downsizing with meeting the need of an ageing population (see below) but we believe the reduction in supply is partly also associated with the lack of other options which previously may have provided a route into shared- or outright home-ownership which also contributed to additional affordable homes becoming available.

Through consultation with Registered Providers we would like to agree and develop ways to improve the use and supply from the existing housing stock to supplement the supply which has been so reliant on new build.

8.2 Allocations

We understand why it is important that homes are advertised at the earliest possible date and the reason for delays between homes being ready to let and tenants being signed up and moving in. It is frustrating and costly though when this becomes a delay to families being able to move on from temporary accommodation as other options come and go in between the period when they are nominated and are eventually able to move.

We therefore want to ensure there is a minimal period between the allocation of homes and the sign up of the tenancy, if not the actual move-in date.

The large number of families in temporary, the associated cost and the growing backlog of families needing temporary accommodation who are in risk of being street-homeless means that we also need to know when a family's temporary accommodation can be ended. We therefore also want to work with Registered Providers to improve communication to avoid delays with the management and allocation of temporary accommodation by knowing as soon as possible when new tenancies start.

Many families have become homeless due to their income being inadequate to meet the cost of living in Chelmsford, they will often incur debt which takes time to repay and will also be at their spending limits whilst in temporary accommodation. For this reason it is often unreasonable to make any offer of suitable housing conditional on their ability to pay rent in advance or expect the Council to meet this cost on their behalf. If Registered Providers are concerned about the need to help ensure against future arrears the Council would consider other ways of dealing with this as no one would want to see families becoming homeless again.

8.3 Adaptations

The Council supports the use of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to improve the supply of homes for people with disabilities along with planning policies encouraging a proportion of new homes which are designed for wheelchair use and other adaptations.

Increased flexibility for the use of DFGs could enable innovation in the way we work in partnership with Registered Providers to improve the supply of homes, whether from the existing stock or new-build, to meet the need of those who need adapted homes to allow them to live independently. The gap between housing need and supply is a concern and it is not acceptable for this to be even greater for those with disabilities including families with disabled children.

8.4 Tenancy Conversion

Some Registered Providers may wish to convert some homes from social tenancies to Affordable Rent tenancies when the properties become available to re-let. This can help supplement revenue to meet the cost of new development but also means an increase in housing costs which could be a problem for those families on very low incomes, especially if needing larger homes. RPs should avoid converting larger social rented homes to Affordable Rent and also the smallest of homes (bedsits and studio apartments for single people), because of the greater impact this would have on these households.

9. Disposal of Affordable Homes

It is sometimes inevitable that the cost of retaining some property can become uneconomical. Landlords must decide as to either a change of use or disposal. Where the RP has imminent and realistic plans that would mean at least a one-for-one replacement using the proceeds from the disposal of property that is no longer financially viable to retain, in addition to what is already planned to be delivered through the Council's Local Plan, then this could be seen as being justifiable.

In other cases, the Council would want to know that all reasonable efforts have been made to accurately assess the actual cost of retention and that all other options have been considered including conversion to a change of use that would still meet the need for affordable housing or transfer to another owner who would be able to retain the property for this or similar purpose. The Council understands the need of RPs to make commercial as well as strategic decisions about their stock, working together to understand both the need for disposal and the need to replace homes can help both work in a transparent way that ensures the best interests of the local community are met. We would therefore expect all RPs considering either disposal or change of use to discuss this at an early stage in their decision-making process.

10 Development of our Refreshed Strategy

We have followed guidance and good practice in reviewing and developing our Tenancy Strategy. It is based upon the need for housing identified in the Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2023). We have then also looked at the need of those who are registered with the Council for housing, broken down into bedroom size, and those in most urgent need because they are at risk of homelessness or having to live in temporary accommodation.

Finally, we have looked at the supply of homes, those that are re-let and new homes, to give an indication of overall housing need and supply. By considering all of the above, we can begin to see where there may be more pressure on some housing and a need to work in partnership to improve supply.

This strategy is developed alongside the Council's Allocations Policy and both are informed by an analysis of housing need. This analysis considers the recommendations of the Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment, a review of need based upon applications for housing and homelessness against recent and planned supply of affordable homes, and a constant review of the need and supply of temporary accommodation. This strategy will be subject to continuous review and is expected to be effective from 2024/29. If there is a need to make amendments in the meantime this will be done after consultation with Registered Providers who are managing and developing homes in the Chelmsford.

Following approval of the Draft Tenancy Strategy a six-week consultation will be undertaken with Registered Providers identified in the Appendix and revised if required prior to final approval.

Appendix Contact details for Registered Providers

Name of Organisation	Postal Address	Email and telephone
Affinity Sutton – now part of Clarion	Level 6, 6 More London Place, Tooley Street, London, SE1 2DA	www.myclarionhousing.com 0300 100 0303
CHP	Myriad House, 23 Springfield Lyons Approach, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 5LB	www.chp.org.uk 0300 555 0500
Colne	Digby House, Riverside Office Centre, Causton Road, Colchester, Essex, CO1 1RJ	www.colnehousing.co.uk 01206 244700
Cotman	Cotman House, Bowthorpe Hall, Bowthorpe Hall road, Norwich, NR5 9AD	www.cotmanhousing.org.uk 0800 028 4240
L&Q	29-35 West Ham Lane, Stratford, London E15 4PH	www.lqgroup.org.uk 0300 456 9996
Peabody	Rowan House, 33 Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3 WG	www.peabody.org.uk/home 01206 773000
Genesis	Head Office, Atelier House, 64 Pratt Street, London, NW1 0DL	www.genesisha.org.uk 033 3000 5000
Habinteg	Holyer house, 20-21 Red Lion Court, London , EC4A 3EB	www.habinteg.org.uk 020 7822 8700
Hastoe	Rectory Farm Barns, Little Chesterford, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 1UD	www.hastoe.com 0300 123 2250
Home Group	1 Steeple House, Church Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1NH	www.homegroup.org.uk 01245 346 668
John Henry Keene	John Henry Keene Memorial Homes Broomfield Road Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1RJ	clerk@keenehomes.org.uk 07752 758670
London & Quadrant (L&Q)	29-35 West Ham Lane, London E15 4PH	www.lqgroup.org.uk 0300 456 9996
Masonic	Hamilton Court, Nelson Place, South Woodham Ferrers, CM3 5FJ	www.hamilton-court.co.uk 01245 323 743
Moat	Second Floor Office, Fullbridge Mill, Maldon, Essex CM9 4LE	www.moat.co.uk 0300 323 0011
Sanctuary	Shaftesbury Sanctuary Housing, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely CB7 4EE	www.sanctuary-group.co.uk 0800 131 3348 (landline) 0300 123 3511 (mobile)
Clarion	Level 6, 6 More London Place, Tooley Street, London, SE1 2DA	www.myclarionhousing.com 0845 600 1543 SPH

Origin Housing	St Richards House, 110 Eversholt Street, London, NW1 1BS	www.originhousing.org.uk 0300 323 0325
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Appendix 2 - Registered Providers

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Colne	Digby House, Riverside Office Centre, Causton Road, Colchester, Essex, CO1 1RJ	www.colnehousing.co.uk 01206 244700
Cotman	Cotman House, Bowthorpe Hall, Bowthorpe Hall road, Norwich, NR5 9AD	www.cotmanhousing.org.uk 0800 028 4240
L&Q	29-35 West Ham Lane, Stratford, London E15 4PH	www.lqgroup.org.uk 0300 456 9996
Peabody	Rowan House, 33 Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3 WG	www.peabody.org.uk/home 01206 773000
Genesis	Head Office, Atelier House, 64 Pratt Street, London, NW1 0DL	www.genesisha.org.uk 033 3000 5000
Habinteg	Holyer house, 20-21 Red Lion Court, London , EC4A 3EB	www.habinteg.org.uk 020 7822 8700
Hastoe	Rectory Farm Barns, Little Chesterford, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 1UD	www.hastoe.com 0300 123 2250
Home Group	1 Steeple House, Church Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1NH	www.homegroup.org.uk 01245 346 668
John Henry Keene	John Henry Keene Memorial Homes Broomfield Road Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1RJ	clerk@keenehomes.org.uk 07752 758670
London & Quadrant (L&Q)	29-35 West Ham Lane, London E15 4PH	www.lqgroup.org.uk 0300 456 9996
Masonic	Hamilton Court, Nelson Place, South Woodham Ferrers, CM3 5FJ	www.hamilton-court.co.uk 01245 323 743
Moat	Second Floor Office, Fullbridge Mill, Maldon, Essex CM9 4LE	www.moat.co.uk 0300 323 0011
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Clarion	Level 6, 6 More London Place, Tooley Street, London, SE1 2DA	www.myclarionhousing.com 0845 600 1543 SPH
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