



Committee and Date
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Item

Public



Independent Living & Specialist Accommodation Strategy

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1. Synopsis

1.1 The proposed Independent Living and Specialist Accommodation Strategy 2024-2028 focuses on supporting people with a diverse range of needs to live independently in suitable accommodation. The proposed strategy sets out an action plan to support people to remain within their familiar homes and established support networks or to move to specialist or supported accommodation enabling them to live independent and healthy lives.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The proposed Independent Living and Specialist Accommodation Strategy (“the Strategy”) which has completed an eight-week public and stakeholder consultation period, highlights the critical importance of housing as more than just shelter, emphasising the need for homes that meet various housing needs, especially for older people, those considered to be vulnerable, and people with disabilities.

2.2 The strategy focuses on supporting people to live independently in accommodation suited to their needs. This approach is a commitment to, whenever possible, supporting people to live longer independent lives and as such helping mitigate wider care demand pressures. It aligns with the Shropshire Plan 2022-2025 1, a key feature of which is the “Healthy People” priority, centred on promoting healthy living, a robust economy, a sustainable environment, and an efficient organisation, all of which are connected to housing initiatives. It focuses on addressing the housing needs of vulnerable

¹ [the Shropshire Plan 2022-2025 | Shropshire Council](#)

populations in Shropshire, emphasising supported independent and specialist accommodation.

‘We will tackle inequalities, including rural inequalities, and poverty in all its forms; providing early support and interventions that reduce risk and enable children, young people, adults, and families to achieve their full potential and enjoy life.’

- 2.3 All four of the Shropshire Plan priorities link to housing: from tackling inequality, promoting independent living, and preventing homelessness; to ensuring the right mix of housing, reducing carbon emissions, and promoting affordable warmth; to making the best use of the Council’s resources.
- 2.4 This report provides insights into the risks addressed by the proposed strategy and sets out recommendations to improve outcomes. The priorities for action within this strategy form an Action Plan at Appendix I of the strategy document which will allow monitoring and review of the Strategy. It is proposed to review the Strategy annually, providing the opportunity to reflect changes in Government policy and funding streams.
- 2.5 The consultation report details responses on the draft Strategy following an eight-week public and stakeholder consultation and comments received, shown at Appendix III. The public consultation received 42 responses from individuals or members of the public or representatives of a local group or organisation.
- 2.6 The feedback from the public consultation was generally supportive of the Strategy and most positive about the vision to enable older, vulnerable and disabled people to lead independent lives in housing suited to their needs.
- 2.7 The following amendments have been made to the draft strategy in response to feedback from the public consultation and comments received.
- 2.8 A definition of ‘accessible housing’ has been incorporated in paragraph 6.11 to read “Accessible housing refers to housing that is wheelchair accessible and meets other physical accessibility requirements”, based on a respondent’s suggestion.
- 2.9 Several respondents suggested equal focus on housing for adults impacted with learning difficulties and/or people with neurodiverse conditions. A specific comment referenced the potential conflict and lack of support when placing neurodiverse individuals and those with mental health issues in retirement communities. In response, the strategy has been reviewed and amended to clarify our commitment to supporting people to remain within their familiar homes and establish support networks wherever possible. The strategy also emphasises the option to move into specialist or supported accommodation, enabling individuals to live independent and healthy lives. This approach prioritises individual choice and aims to deliver intergenerational communities. Furthermore, the strategy has been amended to indicate that there are various housing options available beyond intergenerational communities. The Strategy has been amended to clarify that intergenerational communities do not necessarily refer to a retirement setting, allowing a broader and more flexible approach to housing solutions for all vulnerable adults. Terminology within the strategy has been amended and a new subheading at section 17 highlights its importance within the strategy.
- 2.10 A respondent highlighted that the strategy lacks sufficient integration of domestic abuse considerations, despite its significant impact on individuals seeking homelessness support from the local authority. They emphasised the importance of embedding

domestic abuse awareness throughout the strategy rather than confining it to specific sections. While the strategy's format dedicates separate sections to various vulnerable populations such as rough sleepers, older people, and vulnerable young people, including domestic abuse, the respondent suggested a more integrated approach. It's important to note that the council consulted with the domestic abuse strategic lead and team and sought feedback on the draft strategy, adjusting it accordingly. Efforts continue to ensure that domestic abuse is appropriately addressed across all aspects of the strategy.

- 2.11 A comment highlighted the issue of individuals being unable to access online services due to monitoring, making it unsafe for everyone to use online resources. In response to the feedback received, the strategy has been amended at paragraph 3.2 to include considerations of technology-facilitated abuse and the inability for some individuals to safely access online services.
- 2.12 The heading at section 20 has been amended from domestic violence and abuse to read Domestic Abuse and now includes Sanctuary assessors at paragraph 20.6. This addition ensures that both physical and emotional safety are considered within the strategy. A new definition has been included to further explain priority need under the Housing Act 1996, ensuring that the updated language is clear and easily understood.
- 2.13 Some respondents highlighted the homeownership for people with long term disabilities (HOLD) scheme. Whilst the HOLD scheme does not operate in Shropshire, following this consultation feedback, the strategy has been amended to include a link to an external organisation who can provide support at paragraph 9.5.
- 2.14 A respondent raised concerns about the lack of focus on housing for adults with learning disabilities and people with neurodivergence conditions. Terminology within the strategy has been amended to include neurodiverse conditions to describe a range of neurological differences.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to approve and adopt the Independent Living and Specialist Accommodation Strategy, attached as Appendix I.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1 Inadequate Accommodation Supply: There is a risk that the current housing supply may not adequately meet the demand for vulnerable populations. This could result in delays in providing suitable accommodation. To mitigate the risks, the strategy advocates for additional accommodation, including dispersed move-on units and supported housing schemes, targeting areas of highest need.
- 4.2 Collaborative Partnerships: Establishing and sustaining partnerships with both statutory and voluntary organisations to support vulnerable populations, for example working with refugees, could encounter challenges (resource constraints, policy misalignment, co-ordination issues), potentially impacting the effective delivery of services. To mitigate

the risk, it is proposed to identify and address these challenges through a robust collaborative framework, which can enhance effectiveness of partnerships and improve outcomes for vulnerable people.

- 4.3 Addressing potential resistance to a preventative approach to homelessness and re-offending is essential to the success of the plan. The Council recognises the sensitivity of the issue within the community and an awareness campaign could be launched to highlight the benefits of a preventative approach, fostering a sense of community support and understanding. Our approach is to engage in constructive dialogue that bridges gaps and promotes a more comprehensive solution.
- 4.4 An Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) initial screening record has been completed, at Appendix II. The screening process ahead of the consultation indicated a medium positive impact across the Protected Characteristic groupings as set out in the Equality Act 2010, particularly Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity, and Sex (caring responsibilities). There are additional positive impacts anticipated for people from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, who are within the Protected Characteristic grouping of Race. There are anticipated medium positive impacts for those individuals and households who may be vulnerable and at risk of social exclusion. This includes individuals and households who present as homeless, and households living in fuel poverty, as well as intersectionality for individuals regarding Age. For example, young people who are care leavers and may also have a learning disability and/or a neurodiverse condition and considering the circumstances in which people may find themselves. For the groupings of Race and of Religion or Belief, the impact is anticipated to be neutral to low positive with outreach efforts to engage with those for whom English is not their first language, for example, refugee families.
- 4.5 Following feedback indicating that these impacts are achievable, the Council will seek to maximise positive equality impacts for those we consider may be vulnerable, including people fleeing hate crime and people with disabilities. This will include efforts to consider the needs of people with neurodiverse conditions and/or learning disabilities, which came up in the consultation responses. Additionally, there will be an anticipated positive impact for veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families, for whom the Council seeks to have due regard as per the Armed Forces Act 2021. This builds upon consideration already given to this grouping and to care leavers, with the latter now regarded as a distinct local grouping.
- 4.6 A potential negative impact which had been identified at initial screening stage was displacement or disruption of support networks. While this has not emerged as a significant issue through consultation, the Council will still seek to gauge the depth of this potential negative impact as well as ways to enhance predicted positive impacts.
- 4.7 Being able to access an affordable dwelling which meets a household's needs is essential to health and well-being. For example, this could be an allocation of a flat in an extra care sheltered scheme to an older person with disabilities, allowing them to be able to continue to have "their own front door" and live independently instead of moving into residential care or potentially being admitted to hospital due to a fall. Or instead providing a house which is affordable, of good quality and has security of tenure to a family threatened with homelessness, allowing them to create a home for their children and reducing the worry of a no-fault eviction or being able to afford an increase in rent. Regarding homelessness, people who experience rough sleeping over a long period are more likely to die young than the general population. Rough sleepers also experience some of the most severe health inequalities.

- 4.8 In evaluating the strategy's impact on housing stability, mental and physical health, and social inclusion, opportunities to enhance positive impacts will be at the forefront of monitoring and review, with the aim that regular monitoring and ongoing engagement will ensure such impacts are identified and adjustments made to project delivery. To mitigate any negative impacts and enhance positive impacts, overall recommendations are around conducting thorough assessments of housing accessibility and adaptation needs for people with disabilities, implementing measures to prevent homelessness and address housing instability, and promoting social inclusion, equality and the wellbeing of Shropshire residents.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Shropshire Council is currently managing an unprecedented financial position as budgeted for with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved by Council on 29 February 2024 and detailed in our monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. This demonstrates that significant management action is required over the remainder of the financial year to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all Cabinet Reports provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. Where non-essential spend is identified within the Council, this will be reduced. This may involve
- scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope,
 - delaying implementation, or
 - extending delivery timescales.
- 5.2 Several of the priorities in the proposed action plan are already in hand or have been agreed, and will be funded by existing resources, for example, grant funding from central Government or through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan. Each further project associated with the strategy, where delivered by the Council, will be subject to its own funding approval, contingent upon a thorough business case evaluation, availability of funding and appropriate approvals. This approach ensures that financial considerations are assessed individually for each project, maintaining transparency and accountability in resource allocation. It should be noted that opportunities to work with Registered Provider landlords to support the delivery of the Strategy will also be taken.
- 5.3 Service Delivery Costs: Collaborative efforts with statutory and voluntary organisations may require financial commitments to ensure effective service delivery to vulnerable populations, including refugees and older individuals. Any proposed financial commitment will be considered against its ability to deliver best value and best outcome for individuals and the authority.
- 5.4 Maintenance and Adaptations: Ensuring accessible and adaptable housing may involve expenses related to maintenance, adaptations and modifications over time. Any future financial commitment will be appraised to ensure it delivers value for money, and that it is within the scope of agreed budgets.
- 5.5 The Strategy recognises that capital funding will be essential for the construction, development and adaptation of additional accommodation, including supported housing

schemes and dispersed move-on units. To secure the necessary capital, the strategy outlines a multifaceted approach. Government grants and programs specifically aimed at supporting vulnerable populations and homelessness prevention can provide substantial financial support for the capital requirements of the strategy, ensuring the necessary infrastructure can be developed and adapted to meet the community's needs. Where the delivery is undertaken by Shropshire Council it will always be the intention to develop residential accommodation within the HRA. Each proposed scheme would be subject to its own business case and individual approvals process.

- 5.6 Property acquisition: If new properties are acquired to support vulnerable populations, capital expenditure will be necessary for property purchase. The use of right-to-buy receipts will be considered as a valuable source of capital for this strategy. These receipts can be reinvested strategically to support housing initiatives, including the development of affordable and supported housing solutions, aligning with the goals of this strategy. As with the development of new accommodation, it will always be the intention, when delivery is undertaken by the Council, to acquire new homes into the HRA. Each proposed acquisition would be subject to its own business case and individual approvals process.
- 5.7 The Council recognises the need strategically to utilise the Domestic Abuse Grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government funds. This grant serves as a crucial resource allocation, enabling the facilitation of specialist support services to help people rebuild their lives in a safe environment. The funding will be used by the council to plan support services and work closely with local charities and other service providers to best meet the needs of victims who have had to flee their homes.
- 5.8 Homelessness Prevention grants can support affordable housing construction, expand supported housing, fund adaptive housing developments, promote housing first initiatives, housing for vulnerable populations, funding Sanctuary schemes, investing in supported infrastructure, collaborative projects and preventative measures such as homelessness prevention programs, and mediation services to keep individuals and families at risk of homelessness in stable housing situations.
- 5.9 Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding can be channelled into the creation of housing options through a strategic and collaborative approach. To include acquisition or development of housing units, supportive housing models, rapid housing programs, a housing first approach, housing navigators and case managers, landlord partnerships, temporary housing solutions, community-based housing and allocating a portion of RSI funding to prevention strategies.
- 5.10 Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) present a potential funding source, promoting collaborations across public, private and voluntary sectors to effectively address social challenges within the strategy. This approach diversifies funding sources and aligns with the broader goal of achieving social impact through strategic financial partnerships.
- 5.11 Collaborative Funding: It involves the pooling of resources, both financial and non-financial, from multiple stakeholders, such as government bodies, charitable organisations and private entities, to address specific social challenges. This collaborative approach encourages a shared responsibility towards achieving common goals, such as improving independent living facilities and specialised accommodations.
- 5.12 Whilst approving the strategy has no direct financial implications, any projects seeking funding from the council will be considered within the context of the council's financial

situation and subject to approved budgets and where applicable individual business cases.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1 Energy efficiency and Carbon Offset: Positive effect – The strategy's proactive approach to accessible and energy-efficient housing design is anticipated to result in reduced energy and fuel consumption among vulnerable populations. This not only leads to lower utility costs for residents but also aligns with carbon offsetting and mitigation goals. This strategy emphasises sustainable practices such as tree planting, along with the extensive use of recycled or biogenic building materials. This comprehensive strategy addresses both immediate energy consumption concerns and broader objectives related to carbon emissions, contributing to a more sustainable and environmentally friendly housing solution.
- 6.2 Renewable Energy Generation: Positive effect – While the report does not specifically address renewable energy generation, the emphasis on modern, aspirational housing may include provisions for renewable energy sources. This could contribute to increased renewable energy generation in the long term.
- 6.3 Climate Change Adaptation: Positive effect – While not explicitly mentioned, the strategy's focus on adaptable and accessible housing suggests a proactive approach to climate change adaptation. Housing designed to withstand climate challenges can enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations.
- 6.4 Environmental impact: Positive effect – the strategy's emphasis on accessibility and sustainable design principles is likely to have a positive impact on the environment. Reduced energy consumption, improved building materials, and sustainable practices contribute to a more environmentally friendly approach.

7. Background

- 7.1 It is good practice to have a specific housing strategy that effectively addresses the diverse needs of vulnerable individuals within our community, even though it is not a statutory requirement. The Independent Living and Specialist Accommodation Strategy has a clear vision: to enable older, vulnerable and people with disabilities to lead independent lives in housing suitable to their needs.
- 7.2 This vision underpins our two overarching objectives, which are at the heart of this strategy. First and foremost, our strategy is committed to promoting independent and healthy lives for all vulnerable populations. We recognise the significance of empowering older, vulnerable, and people with disabilities to maintain their independence within housing suitable to their needs.
- 7.3 Secondly, the strategy is dedicated to delivering, enabling and commissioning supported and specialist accommodation that directly addresses the housing needs of the community. We understand that not everyone's housing needs are the same, and therefore, we are committed to providing a range of housing solutions to cater to the diverse requirements of our residents. These objectives are the guiding principles of the strategy, directing our actions and initiatives. Our goal is to enhance living conditions and support services for vulnerable individuals across Shropshire.

- 7.4 The strategy is inclusive, encompassing a broad spectrum of vulnerable populations, including older adults, people with physical and mental disabilities, people with less visible disabilities such as neurodiverse conditions, or Crohn’s Disease, individuals with hidden disabilities, care leavers, survivors of domestic abuse, ex-offenders, and refugees. We are dedicated to tailoring our housing solutions to meet the unique needs of each group, ensuring their safety and wellbeing.
- 7.5 Key to the approach is a strong emphasis on supported housing schemes, including both temporary and permanent housing options. This approach extends to additional accommodation, such as dispersed move-on units and supported housing schemes, strategically expanding in areas of the highest need. By doing so, we are committed to providing appropriate and accessible housing design, along with the necessary adaptations, to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities.
- 7.6 Whilst approval of the strategy has no direct financial implications in itself, we will explore various funding sources, optimising budget allocation and off-setting cost savings, and collaborating effectively to ensure the delivery of the strategy and, most importantly, the wellbeing of all our residents.
- 7.7 Each of the Strategy’s objectives contains “Priorities for action” which together form an action plan, allowing for monitoring and review of the Strategy. It is proposed that the Strategy is reviewed annually, to provide the opportunity to reflect changes in Government policy and funding streams.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 In conclusion, the Independent Living and Specialist Accommodation Strategy represents a commitment to improving the quality of life for vulnerable populations within our local authority area.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet report, 21 February 2024, Draft Independent Living and Specialist Accommodation Strategy

Local Member: All Members

Appendices

Appendix I: Independent Living and Specialist Accommodation Strategy

Appendix II: ESHIA

Appendix III: Independent Living and Specialist Accommodation Strategy Consultation: Public and stakeholder feedback June 2024

