



Luton Housing Strategy 2022 to 2027

Author: Claire Astbury

Contact: Claire.astbury@luton.gov.uk

Version: 1.0 (published)

Last updated: December 2022

Contents

1. Foreword.....	3
Foreword from Councillor Shaw	3
2. Executive summary.....	3
3. Luton 2020 to 2040: a place to thrive.....	4
4. Local context.....	5
Headline figures about Luton.....	5
Targets and priority actions – how we work.....	7
Strategic context	7
5. Current and future considerations.....	8
Building safety.....	8
Tenant’s charter	8
Planning law.....	8
BLMK integrated care system.....	8
Domestic Abuse Act implementation	8
Care leavers.....	8
Social care white paper.....	8
Integration white paper	8
6. Right Homes, More Homes.....	9
What do we hope to achieve?.....	9
6.1 Current position.....	9
6.2 Opportunities and challenges.....	10
6.3 Targets and priority actions.....	11
7. Reducing homelessness.....	13
What do we hope to achieve?.....	13
7.1 Current position.....	13
7.2 Opportunities and challenges.....	14
7.3 Targets and priority actions.....	15
8. Quality homes and neighbourhoods	16
What do we hope to achieve?.....	16
8.1 Current position.....	16
8.2 Opportunities and challenges.....	17
8.3 Targets and priority actions.....	19
9. Supporting wellbeing.....	20
What do we hope to achieve?.....	20
9.1 Current position.....	20
9.2 Opportunities and challenges.....	21
9.3 Targets and priority actions.....	22
10 Risk profile	22

1. Foreword

Foreword from Councillor Shaw

A good home is the starting point for a good life. In Luton we know that people having a secure affordable home is essential to our ambitions for eradicating poverty and helping everyone to thrive.

In Luton we work with a range of partners to make homes available, improve the quality of properties and support wellbeing.

Our greatest challenge is to ensure that suitable, good quality, affordable homes are available to all who need them. Too many people are struggling with housing costs, homelessness, inaccessible and unhealthy homes. Levelling up starts at home.

We will meet this challenge through taking up all opportunities to provide new homes which meet local needs, and improving the homes we already have in the town.

The climate challenge grows ever more urgent so reducing carbon emissions from homes is a key aspect of the council's work.

The pandemic has reinforced our understanding of the importance of home to support good health and wellbeing. Housing is not just about bricks and mortar but the surrounding neighbourhoods, and the ability to live well.

Specialist housing provision is an essential part of an independent and healthy life. We have great places and communities in Luton, and will make a contribution through our housing work to improve wellbeing across the town.

2. Executive summary

Good housing is crucial to achieving wider ambitions for Luton, as expressed in our Luton 2040 Vision. Housing underpins our commitments to a thriving economy, population wellbeing, and meeting our net-zero carbon targets. Housing is also a social justice issue and supports our ambitions for Luton to be a fair and child-friendly town.

Our housing strategy sets out how we plan to ensure that the local people benefit from good quality, affordable and appropriate housing and services.

The council and its partners are well placed to play an active role in the local housing market through development, engagement and enforcement, so that people have healthy homes and neighbourhoods they can be proud of, and specialist needs are met, supporting independent living.

Aligned to the Luton 2020 to 2040 agenda, by 2027 we aim to ensure:

- good and improving housing services for residents, and tenants of all social landlords in the town
- an active and increasing role for our residents and tenants
- at least 425 new homes and 85 new affordable homes each year
- council led activity in the local private rental market making more homes available at lower cost
- more of the homes we most need, especially family homes
- significant reductions in the use of temporary accommodation, to under 500 households
- no rough sleeping in Luton
- improved conditions in the private rented sector through extension of licensing
- reduction of fuel poverty through additional energy efficiency measures to homes of all tenures
- full compliance with emerging building safety and fire safety requirements

3. Luton 2020 to 2040: a place to thrive

Luton Council, alongside local partners, has a truly ambitious vision for Luton that builds on our strengths and key assets as a town as well our shared values. Together, we will build on the success of recent years and overcome the challenges we face today to build a healthier, fairer and more sustainable town where everyone can thrive and no-one has to live in poverty.

Our approach is set out in the Luton 2020 to 2040 vision. Our strategy for housing helps to deliver this ambition because good quality, affordable and sustainable homes are essential to quality of life, health and wellbeing, social justice, community and the local economy. Housing outcomes underpin all five of our strategic priority areas.

We won't achieve all these outcomes on our own. As well as collaborating across the council, we are actively working with other partners across community, voluntary, business and public sectors to influence and enable projects which improve lives.

Housing supports our wider ambitions on health, skills, employment and better places and we work with partners such as housing associations, clinical commissioners, education institutions, housing developers, builders and local businesses to make a difference on the ground.

Luton 2040 priorities



4. Local context

Headline figures about Luton



- 225,300 residents in the town in 78,900 households.
- Super diverse town – 55% non-White-British.
- One of the youngest populations in the country – 29% of residents under 20.
- Over 65 population grew by 11% between 2011 and 2021.



- The median house price in increased by 18% in the past two years.
- The median house price is 8.5 times the median gross annual earnings for residents.
- 29% of homes are rented privately, twice the amount of social housing in the town.
- Luton has the highest temporary accommodation use of comparable councils – 13.69 in every 1000 households



- Domestic buildings account for 29% of carbon emissions in Luton.
- 8% of households experience low income/high cost fuel poverty, rising to 12% of private tenants



- More than 1 in 4 workers earning below the Real Living Wage.
- 23,000 employees on zero-hour and agency contracts.
- Claimant count of 8.4% - up from 3.4% in March 2020 – the sharpest rise in the country.



- 33.4% of households are living below the Luton Minimum Income Standard for a decent standard of living, with 12.2% unable to afford basic needs.
- 39.4% of children growing up in relative poverty in 2019 to 2020.
- 26% of working households in relative poverty.



- Life expectancy gap of 6.9 years between women in Luton's most deprived and most affluent wards – for men this gap is 5.1 years.
- Male life expectancy in Luton one year less than the national figure.
- Over 25,000 people living with mental health conditions and 3,900 with learning disabilities.

Sources: 2011 and 2021 Census, Land Registry, This Is Luton, Luton 2040, DLUHC

The Covid pandemic had a significant impact on the town especially in relation to employment and health. The effects were felt most deeply by people who were already experiencing the most disadvantage. The pandemic also had greatest impact in particular ethnic groups. Equitable recovery is a central part of our approach and ambitions.

Taking a 'Health in All Policies' approach to housing could significantly impact the health and well-being of populations, especially vulnerable groups. This is more critical than ever, given the context of the pandemic that has led to worsening overall health and well-being. Housing is a key means to support the BLMK Integrated Care System's priorities of Start Well; Live Well, Age Well, Growth and Reducing Inequalities.

Luton has limited land availability and the pattern of development is shifting so that over the next ten years, we will see much more densification and higher buildings become part of the townscape.

Our approach will be based on working in partnership and listening to our residents and communities. We benefit from strong community engagement and initiatives in Luton and will work with residents and communities across the town.

Housing has been identified by our Fairness Taskforce as a social justice issue. With such a significant population of young people, access to appropriate housing is also a generational fairness issue. This is why the council commissioned specific engagement with young people as part of the housing strategy consultation, and the views gathered are reflected in this document.

The Fairness Taskforce expressed ambitions to ensure Luton has 'safe, secure and truly affordable housing for everyone' and is 'A place where nobody needs to sleep outside on the streets'.

We are increasing our engagement with tenants and residents so our services are responsive and accessible. Our customer approach supports early interventions, integrated services and easy digital options for people, whilst providing additional support where needed.

Our council wealth building approach supports the local economy and the council is actively investing in housing projects as part of this approach. This plays a part in Levelling Up the local economy and building relevant skills for the future.

Case study: Listening to tenants and residents



Pam (Chair) of the Tenant Board said “During lockdown regular Tenant Board Zoom meetings meant we continued to be involved with budget setting and reviewing housing service performance. Locally we also held a series of small walkabouts across the town. This helps resolve local issues. Recycling in flat blocks was raised by the local tenants and residents group and they now issue recycling bags to residents. This helps the group to both maintain the tidiness of the local area and keep tenants informed and involved.”

John (Vice Chair) of the Tenant Board said “I believe wherever they live, tenants can make a difference to council housing services, and as a Board member, I know it’s an enormous privilege to represent tenants’ views and use them to help ensure housing services are the best that they can be.”

Targets and priority actions – how we work

Housing services will contribute to and deliver our emerging Corporate Customer Commitment so service standards are clearly understood. We will review our housing service delivery to align with the council’s customer service approach.

We will implement a new housing software system which allows for customer visibility, clear information and ensures building safety monitoring and compliance. We will implement the ISO9000 quality assurance system to our housing services.

Strategic context

The housing strategy fits into our strategic delivery framework.

Luton 2040 delivery framework



5. Current and future considerations

During the delivery period for this strategy we are anticipating some major changes in legislation and housing policy, which we will need to incorporate into our work.

Building safety

There will be increased focus on building safety, particularly in relation to the council's own housing stock. New legislation and regulation is anticipated in the next 18 months which mean that we will have additional responsibilities especially for complex and high risk buildings.

Tenant's charter

A welcome change in regulatory oversight and a new inspection regime from the social housing regulator will mean that as a landlord we will be expected to show how we are listening to our tenants and delivering on their priorities. The Housing Ombudsman also has greater powers to ensure redress for poor service.

Planning law

Anticipated changes to planning law and guidance will introduce new approaches to planning and zoning, with a broader range of affordable home ownership tenures expected, including First Homes, for which evidence of demand is not yet clear, and which may impact on site viability for other affordable housing tenures.

Feedback from our consultation included concerns about First Homes and their potential to reduce genuinely affordable housing delivery, and this is an issue we will be monitoring so we can implement local policies to minimise negative affects.

BLMK integrated care system

The establishment of an integrated care system for the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes area in July 2022 provides opportunities for improved liaison between health, social care and housing systems. The strategic priorities they have targeted are: Start Well; Live Well; Age Well, Growth and Reducing Inequalities. Housing contributes to all these priority areas, so Luton Council will be a close partner in supporting the aims of the ICS.

Domestic Abuse Act implementation

The introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act in 2020 requires some changes in terms of how we support victims of domestic abuse, and work with perpetrators. The council is working towards DAHA accreditation from the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.

Care leavers

Care leavers are entitled to support to the age of 25 years old, with implications for independent housing options.

Social care white paper

The government has recognised the importance of housing and accommodation settings in supporting wellbeing for people accessing social care. Changes to strategic work, extension of assistive technology and changes to the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants have been announced with further changes expected to follow to deliver improvements.

Integration white paper

The Integration White Paper was published in February 2022 and sets out an ambition for better integration across:

- primary care
- community health
- adult social care
- acute care
- mental health
- public health
- housing services

It proposes shared outcomes across agencies, and integrated leadership, finance and accountability.

6. Right Homes, More Homes

What do we hope to achieve?

A good mix of homes is available to people in Luton which meet local needs. Luton is an attractive place to deliver new homes and housing is a part of regeneration and transformation in the town. Luton Council is an active and involved partner in driving delivery and increasing access to homes. Increased delivery of affordable homes helps our target to reduce homelessness.

6.1 Current position

Luton has very high levels of housing need and recent housing delivery has not met the most acute need for family sized homes and affordable housing. One factor in this is the homes delivered through Permitted Development Rights which we have very limited opportunity to influence.

In our housing strategy consultation, there was a clear message that local people want to see more family homes and affordable homes in the town. In particular the needs of larger and multi-generational families were highlighted by our consultation, with 72% of respondents stating that family sized homes were their highest priority and solutions proposed including larger homes, homes with space to extend, and the importance of gardens.

An important challenge for the council, developers and partners will be to win the confidence of residents though high quality new developments which meet needs, whilst delivering at higher density in new urban forms.

Our Local Plan, adopted in 2017, set out a need for 17,800 homes to meet needs over the plan period 2011 to 2031. However our Local Plan only provides for the delivery of 8,500 homes with the remainder to be provided in neighbouring boroughs. The Central Bedfordshire Local Plan, adopted in 2021, includes most of this provision, with further allocations expected from the North Hertfordshire Local Plan in the next year.

The Local Plan requires 20% affordable housing on sites over 11 homes, whilst neighbouring local plans require 30% affordable housing. However there is currently no established mechanism to make homes in neighbouring areas available to households on the Luton Housing Register. Viability considerations, relating to site remediation, infrastructure and other costs, present a significant challenge to delivery of affordable homes in the area.

Affordable housing is defined in planning policy and covers a wide range of tenures and price points. We know from local data that the most affordable forms of accommodation are homes at regulated Social Rents or Affordable Rents; rents of all kinds which fall within Local Housing Allowance levels; and shared ownership models of low-cost home ownership.

Housing delivery over the past six years has been varied, with an average yearly supply of 649 homes, of which 98 (around 15%) were affordable.

Year	Total	Of which, affordable
2021/22	332	18
2020/21	474	71
2019/20	791	173
2018/19	627	69
2017/18	873	134
2016/17	798	127

There are around 9,000 households on the council's housing register. In 2020 to 21, partly due to the Covid crisis, we accepted a homelessness duty for 432 households. This fell to 224 in 2021 to 22. Demand for affordable housing remains extremely high and this was the most common comment from respondents to our housing strategy consultation.

Meeting the shortfall of supply is a priority for Luton Council, with a clear demand for an additional 300 affordable homes to rent each year, above current availability.

The council has responsibilities to maintain a Self-Build and Custom Build register and seek to enable serviced self-build plots. Although the number on the register is low, it has proved difficult to bring forward appropriate self-build serviced plots which meet the government definition. Our local plan does not include planning policy which could enforce the delivery of self-build plots.

Case study: Oakley House Affordable Housing Scheme



Oakley House is a scheme of 65 affordable homes by Hightown Housing Association at a former employment site in Leagrave. The scheme is Hightown's fifth in the town, demonstrating a growing commitment to providing affordable housing in Luton and to land-led schemes.

The project was granted planning permission in November 2021 and is expected to complete in 2024. Andrew Royall from Hightown said 'This planning permission helps us continue our mission of building as many high quality homes as we can to respond to the shortage of affordable housing in Luton'.

6.2 Opportunities and challenges

Luton Council has the ambition to encourage significant investment in new homes and to deliver homes directly. We are developing through our wholly owned company, Foxhall Homes as well as the Housing Revenue Account.

Our procurement approach follows our Wealth Building Strategy which supports the economy through local supply chains and social value. Rising values in Luton, whilst creating affordability challenges, make the town an attractive place to develop new homes. This stronger housing market better supports viability and additional planning gain.

Housing is fundamental to our ambition for Luton to be a place where no one is stuck in poverty. We know that those living in private rented housing are most likely to be struggling to cover rent and other bills on a month by month basis. They are also most likely to be the next homeless approaches to the council, seeking housing assistance.

As such, we aim to intervene in the rental market in Luton to drive up standards, availability and affordability: we currently own around one in ten properties in our town, we intend to increase that.

We will test the concept of a new council company which can purchase properties in and around our town with a core focus of providing good quality, well-managed homes, offered at a range of rent levels affordable to tenants, with the ambition to hold most rents at 80% of the market rate. Officers will also look at developing a Luton Living Rent, which offers tenants more affordability for homes offered through any new company which is set up.

This will mean those currently living in private sector homes, which in our town are too often poorly maintained, will be able to move into well managed, good quality homes at the same time as making a saving on their monthly housing costs. Keeping more money in people's pockets in this way will be a significant step towards ensuring no one is stuck in poverty in our town.

The council will also explore opportunities to participate more fully in local supply through working with providers and developers in the area to acquire new homes, and partner with SME developers and larger developers.

Council executive members have agreed to maximise the capacity of our Housing Revenue Account capital programme through additional appropriate borrowing, in order to invest in new homes so we can meet our ambitions to reduce poverty and homelessness.

Although land supply is restricted in Luton there are some significant strategic sites and opportunities across the town, especially in our town centre. Our Town Centre Masterplan was adopted in 2021 and seeks to support the provision of family sized homes as part of transforming the centre as an aspirational location to live and to provide a greater mix of accommodation.

Within Luton there are some very large sites coming forward with significant housing provision such as Power Court and several sites on Kimpton Road. A steady stream of windfall and infill sites also support local small and medium sized (SME) developers and builders.

Construction is an important part of our local economy and supports our Inclusive Growth and Local Wealth Building approach – with the potential to create sustainable jobs and skills. Local investment in construction skills contributes to long term economic strength.

Our performance is improving in securing affordable homes through the planning process but there is further to go. Challenges do exist in terms of access to land, and the costs of remediating brownfield land. Securing the right mix of homes especially family sized homes, remains a key challenge.

We will take the opportunity arising from the finalisation of the Central Bedfordshire and North Hertfordshire Local Plans to secure additional homes to meet Luton's needs. We will review our Article 4 Directions based on new legislation to protect key employment sites.

Our increasing engagement with our community and grassroots based solutions could provide more opportunity to mobilise community wealth towards a community land trust or community self-build projects.

Consultation with residents and stakeholders, as well as our targeted youth consultation, told us that people placed most importance on more new and affordable homes meeting local needs. 60% of respondents supported our proposed actions, with more affordable homes, zero carbon homes, and better amenity space identified as elements which needed more focus.

6.3 Targets and priority actions

A minimum of 425 net new homes a year in Luton as set out in the Luton Local Plan with a minimum of 20% affordable (85 per year).

A minimum of 900 council-led homes over the 2022 to 2027 period, including at least 350 affordable homes.

Publish a Housing Supply Plan which sets out how we will maximise our capacity to deliver more homes and work with partners to build homes to meet Luton's housing needs, encouraging local labour and skills.

We will explore options to set up a company to acquire homes to offer at below market rents, increasing the council's ability to shape the rental offer in Luton.

An aspiration to achieve 350 new affordable homes a year by the end of the strategy period, driven by council-led delivery, resulting in at least 700 lettings per year to affordable homes by 2027.

60% of all new homes and 80% of council-led homes to be family sized (2 bedroom 4 person minimum) between 2022 and 2027.

A minimum 10% of new affordable homes to be wheelchair accessible.

We will review our Article 4 protections around permitted development to respond to government changes, giving more oversight to homes created through building conversions and protecting employment locations.

We will create opportunities for delivery of a range of options for households seeking housing, who are unlikely to receive an offer from our housing register; including improved pathways for tenants and applicants to access intermediate and low cost home ownership, keeping under review the role of First Homes.

We will support self-build and meet statutory requirements to provide serviced plots.

Improve partnerships and communication with housing developers and affordable housing providers including potential community build projects, driving the progress of any stalled sites.

We will keep under review the needs of people in Luton especially in relation to the large cohort of younger people in the town.

We will monitor the impacts of changes to the planning system in particular the effects of First Homes, and introduce local restrictions if necessary.

7. Reducing homelessness

What do we hope to achieve?

Households in Luton have access to high quality employment and support which helps to secure long term accommodation which is suitable and affordable. Low income households are also able to access the private rented sector affordably.

When people need advice and support, the council will be proactive in preventing homelessness, and prompt in dealing with statutory homelessness applications. We will continue to reduce the use of temporary accommodation and help people to secure settled accommodation. We will work in partnership to eliminate rough sleeping.

7.1 Current position

Homelessness is a major challenge in Luton and the town is an outlier in the use of temporary accommodation. Too many households struggle to secure appropriate housing and the cost of rents in the private sector are well above Local Housing Allowance levels making them out of reach for any low income households, including many people who are in work.

At November 2021, actual rents were 10 to 25% above LHA levels, depending on size of property, meaning that households on low incomes would need to find an additional £8 to £58 per week to top up the shortfall.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted on homelessness in a number of ways. Rough sleeping was virtually eliminated through the 'Everyone In' initiative during 2020 to 2021 but has started to increase following the ending of targeted funding, especially for people with No Recourse to Public Funds.

Our consultation told us that local residents are concerned about rough sleeping and the feel of the town centre. It's clear that visible begging and street drinking create a perception that the rough sleeper numbers are higher than they actually are. Supporting very vulnerable people prone to exploitation is about more than just housing, and will have an impact on residents feeling safe and welcome in the town.

Luton's economy was particularly hard hit during the pandemic due to the role of the airport in providing local jobs and supply chain demand. The town had one of the highest furlough rates in the country which meant that households were more likely to have a change of circumstances and move onto Universal Credit from other legacy benefits.

The claimant count for working age people increased by around 120% during the pandemic. Housing affordability remained a challenge throughout the pandemic, and a more limited housing market reduced opportunities to secure housing.

Case study: Homelessness prevention

Our homelessness prevention officer was able to negotiate with a private landlord so that a family could stay in the home where they had lived for ten years. The landlord had been looking to renegotiate the rent and our financial assessment showed the family were able to afford a change in rent.

The council supported the transition through short term financial assistance. This intervention prevented a homelessness application, helped the family to remain for at least another two years and also stabilised a fostering placement for a looked after child.

Homelessness approaches were 2,032 in 2019 to 2020 and fell to 1,625 in 2020 to 2021, rising to 4,652 in 2021 to 2022. The most common reason for homelessness is the ending of a private tenancy or family and friends being unable to accommodate

As a major landlord in the town the work we do with our tenants to sustain tenancies and prevent evictions is a part of a broader homelessness prevention offer. Our homelessness service was reshaped in 2020 to better meet demand and place greater focus on prevention of homelessness.

We also benefit from strong local partnerships with statutory partners and the voluntary sector and work together to support vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. This collaboration has supported a growing Housing First programme to provide long term accommodation with support to former rough sleepers.

However there are individuals known to us and our partners who have complex needs and are not well served by existing services. The council is working with partners to access funding for specialist supported accommodation for exploited women, and for around fifteen units of supported accommodation for people with complex needs.

Information from education services indicates that some schools have seen significant turnover of pupils in their school roll; and temporary accommodation is a factor in this churn which disrupts educational outcomes. Although the use of temporary accommodation is reducing, it remains a significant form of accommodation in the town.

It is essential that this is good quality accommodation, and we have been increasing our oversight on safety compliance and quality, and the management of hostel accommodation, over the past two years.

Feedback from our engagement with young people in the town highlighted also that there is a need for more information and guidance for young people to learn about the housing market and housing options so they are better placed to make life choices as they leave the family home.

7.2 Opportunities and challenges

Luton has a strong infrastructure of partnership which can mobilise quickly to respond to funding opportunities and emerging challenges in homelessness. A key strategic aim is to play our part in keeping partnerships active in the town.

The delivery of more affordable homes is an essential part of meeting our homelessness challenge, but there is more availability in the private rented sector. Maintaining the accessibility of private tenancies as a means of preventing and alleviating homelessness is therefore both an opportunity and a challenge.

The council has responded to this opportunity through establishing a social lettings agency as a joint venture with Squared housing association. Luton Lets Squared has a role to influence the quality of the local rented market and make it more accessible to people on lower incomes who would struggle to meet the requirements of other lettings providers. Luton Lets Squared could have more impact if its financial position was more secure, so we are pursuing diversification into sales which will support this.

Luton has a strategy for post-Covid economic recovery including improvements in skills and employability which will help people secure good jobs and support their families. This will also help to alleviate the risk of homelessness.

As a council we have been very successful in accessing national funding to develop our services to homeless people especially rough sleepers. However, this does mean that a number of homeless services and projects are dependent on short term external funding.

Despite several funding bids, we have so far not secured investment in much needed complex needs accommodation for people who are most at risk of falling between assessment systems. The Rough Sleeping Initiative Grant is due to end in 2025 and will encourage a collaborative approach to commissioning which should deliver ongoing support to people rough sleeping. However, the loss of funding is a risk to services.

There is an opportunity to examine and reshape the model for service provision to be more sustainable over the next two years, in partnership with delivery organisations.

The council also faces a significant financial challenge whilst temporary accommodation usage is so high. Reducing the use of temporary accommodation will not only improve housing options for people in the town but help the council to make necessary savings.

Another challenge faced by the council is the attractiveness of Luton as a location for other authorities placing homeless households into our area. This creates additional demand in the longer term and requires transparency and partnership to ensure people settle well.

These placements have tended to concentrate in permitted development projects converted from office use, some of which have not met required standards. Our activities to limit permitted development schemes, along with close working relationships with other councils and government agencies aim to mitigate the impacts of these placements.

Reducing homelessness and providing specialist support was a priority both for those involved in our youth engagement and our general housing strategy consultation. Among young people, 36% wanted to eliminate rough sleeping in Luton, whilst in our broader survey, a third of respondents supported specialist housing to meet the needs of very vulnerable people.

Case study: Big Change Luton



Led by the Luton Homeless Partnership, Big Change Luton provides an opportunity for people to donate directly to local charities working with people who experience homelessness. Through this funding, personalised support helps with a range of things to help people settle and get back on track.

For example, Declan had help to furnish his first home after living in a tent for eight years, and Chloe was able to apply for a passport which helped to secure accommodation and apply for a driving license to support her in finding work.

7.3 Targets and priority actions

Number in temporary accommodation to reduce to under 700 by 2024 and under 500 by 2027.

Accommodation will be safe secure and suitable for children in temporary accommodation.

We will encourage and support families to move into rented homes within 2 years of entering temporary accommodation.

All temporary accommodation to continue to meet building safety and compliance requirements.

Rough sleeping to reduce to zero by 2027.

Increase income to and expand Luton Lets Squared to support more successful private sector discharges.

Retain and strengthen partnerships including Luton Homeless Partnerships.

Complete and implement system change approach to improve outcomes for vulnerable people at risk of rough sleeping.

Delivery of complex needs accommodation/specialist supported housing for women, directly or with partners.

Work with community partners and education settings to support awareness of housing issues for younger people in the town.

8. Quality homes and neighbourhoods

What do we hope to achieve?

Luton Council makes a difference on the ground through active housing management, in line with tenant input; effective estates management and ensuring homes, of all tenures, are of good quality. The council will be an exemplar for building safety within the town.

Our activities contribute to the council's Zero Carbon target as part of the Luton 2040 agenda and improvements to energy performance also tackle fuel poverty in the town. Homes and neighbourhoods support our ambitions to be a Child Friendly Town.

8.1 Current position

People in Luton really care about the town and we know that they have concerns about poor quality homes and neighbourhood issues such as fly tipping and anti-social behaviour. Responses to our consultation indicated concerns with parking, access to green spaces, and tackling poor quality homes.

Work to reduce carbon emissions and reduce fuel poverty was particularly supported by those who engaged with the consultation, and was the second most important issue for young people with 40% saying this was a priority.

Good homes are essential to health, and people's wellbeing, therefore our work to tackle fuel poverty and improve standards, especially in our own stock and in the private rented sector, will be a major contribution towards improved outcomes for people.

As a landlord to around one tenth of homes in the town, the council has important responsibilities towards building safety, providing good quality sustainable homes and supporting wellbeing. During the Covid pandemic, our actions helped to keep people safe at home, including in vulnerable settings such as sheltered housing and temporary accommodation.

Government and regulators are increasing their scrutiny of building safety. The council has a very strong record in regard to buildings compliance, and intends to retain and strengthen this approach.

We have invested heavily in improvements and works to homes, including major cladding projects in our tower blocks to improve energy efficiency. We have also grown our tenant involvement over recent years, despite the challenges of the pandemic, making sure that we are listening to our residents and responding to their concerns, to meet the expectations of the Social Housing Charter and White Paper.

Our tenant scrutiny committee has set out a programme of work to review our services. Their first report on the repairs services has been accepted and improvements are now being tracked.

Our Healthy Estates approach supports active lives, wellbeing and social integration in our council estates. We know that if people feel safe they are more likely to engage and become part of their neighbourhood. Making the environment more attractive will encourage people to exercise, socialise and play, keeping active and connected to their community.

Safe play is a central part of our Child Friendly Town, along with safe walking and cycling routes especially to schools, which also supports our climate change actions. Feedback from the consultation discussions on Child Friendly Town emphasised the role of shared space and community safety to support social interactions and community building.

Case study: High rise cladding project



The council owns ten high rise blocks and is well advanced on a programme of improving these with insulated cladding. Due to start in 2017, the project was held back to engage with tenants, test our materials and provide reassurance about fire safety. So far, work has commenced on all ten blocks, with three blocks completed.

The £34M project is funded through the Housing Revenue Account matched with £8M European ERDF funding through SEMLEP and delivered with Engie and United Living. When the project completes in 2022 it will have improved 1064 homes by increasing their energy rating, ensuring all the homes are at EPC C standard.

Our enforcement work within private sector housing helps to ensure a good quality private rented sector in the town. We are on target to consult around additional licensing across the borough for HMOs and selective licensing for all privately rented homes in South ward. At present, 440 HMOs are licensed, with research from BRE indicating that extending our licensing schemes will bring an additional 4,000 HMOs and 3,500 properties in South Ward under this protection.

We actively pursue a range of enforcement options against landlords who disregard the law by providing unsafe homes and exploiting tenants. We also influence the local lettings market through Luton Lets Squared which is helping to improve standards locally especially for lower income households. Using licensing to tackle poor landlords were supported by over 90% of respondents to our consultation.

Domestic dwellings account for 39% of CO2 emissions in Luton. If we are to be a carbon neutral town by 2040, this will require significant investment and a step change in sustainable technologies for insulation, heating and hot water across all homes, including initiatives which will be attractive to homeowners.

Some of this is outside the council's control but we can inform and encourage energy efficiency for all residents, and we have set minimum energy performance standards for all homes we provide as temporary accommodation. The council has also set minimum standards for new council homes, decarbonising heating where possible.

Long term empty homes can blight neighbourhoods so we have targeted support, backed up by enforcement action, to encourage homes into use, successfully bringing 50 homes into use in 2020 to 2021.

8.2 Opportunities and challenges

Our influence over the homes that we own and manage is a great opportunity to continue to be a local leader in low carbon design, retrofit and housing quality. Our maintenance of our homes, the standards we set for new homes, as well as considering active travel, design and the provision of charging points, all help us to work towards Zero Carbon. We will continue to work with tenants and residents to improve the quality and energy efficiency of homes in the town.

Our growing tenant engagement will help us to target our building safety and community involvement work towards the things that matter most to our residents. The ability to engage closely with tenants provides opportunities to tackle issues such as anti-social behaviour, hoarding and cuckooing which impact on residents and neighbourhoods more generally.

Housing also has access to community assets which can act as a hub for interaction and community building, supporting thriving neighbourhoods, improving community safety and tackling social isolation. Housing projects contribute to the local economy through skills, apprenticeships and local procurement, all helping to build economic resilience in Luton.

We are establishing partnerships around green skills and construction which will create good employment opportunities for local people.

Luton benefits from a strong and active voluntary sector which already delivers street-level improvements such as clean ups, and helps to build a sense of safety and community. It's important to build on this asset in our town, working with our social justice and community engagement teams.

Working with NHS partners, social care and education colleagues and learning from the NHS Healthy New Towns provides us with a great opportunity to create health-promoting homes and neighbourhoods. This means helping people to eat well, be smoke free, physically active, socially connected and live in thermal comfort.

Access to green space and amenity space was also a strong theme in the discussions around what would make Luton a Child Friendly Town and consultation responses also emphasised the importance of safe walking and cycling routes.

As new funding becomes available for improving housing quality and efficiency, we will take up as much opportunity as possible to attract this investment into Luton for the benefit of tenants and residents. We are also exploring opportunities to deliver energy efficiency projects as part of broader carbon offsetting activity linked to London Luton Airport. This could be transformative, especially for privately owned, older homes in the town.

Our expanding licensing activity and our own co-owned lettings company provide opportunities to shape and improve the standards of the private rented market across the town. We also intend to learn from other places, such as Oxford, which have used planning enforcement policies to limit the prevalence of HMOs to protect family homes and limit disruption to neighbourhoods.

We face significant challenges to meeting our low carbon ambitions. Funding options, especially for private homes, availability of trusted skilled installers, and appropriate advice and information are all issues we need to overcome. The growing necessity to retrofit homes will create opportunities in terms of supply chains and training options. We are working strategically with education and training providers to support these new green skills.

Another challenge in this area is how we measure our performance. There is limited comparable data covering the private sector homes in the town. We will work with partners including installers, residents, charitable organisations and local businesses to track our impact.

Case study: Tenant engagement making a difference to neighbourhoods

Tenant Participation staff supported a tenants and residents group in Park Town, which has helped to resolve issues through engagement. For example, consultation with residents led to a change of approach in door security measures making the block safer. The residents have also influenced improvements to a play area to enable it to re-open.

8.3 Targets and priority actions

Council homes to meet EPC Band C by 2025.

A minimum of 400 private homes per year to receive efficiency/decarbonisation improvements via external funding schemes.

No temporary accommodation will be used if it has an EPC rating of D or below.

HMO licensing to cover all appropriate properties by 2025.

Selective licensing to cover all appropriate properties by 2025.

Evaluate current licensing arrangements and Government White Paper proposals to inform an extension of licensing across the borough.

Review the options to limit the prevalence of HMOs in specific areas.

Bring 40 empty homes a year into use through council intervention.

Review opportunities to use ring fenced council tax income on empty homes to support work to bring homes into use.

At least 300 statutory notices resolved per year.

Annual increase in homes which are licensed and inspected.

New homes developed by the council or Foxhall homes to be minimum EPC band B by 2025.

EV charging points to be incorporated in all new housing developments and provision in council estates to be improved.

The council will take an active role in ensuring that sufficient training and skilled labour is available locally to support retrofit activities.

Refresh our asset management plan to include our selected options for the replacement of gas boilers across the council housing stock by 2026.

As a landlord we will observe all new building safety compliance requirements.

We will grow our tenant engagement and meet all expectations of the Social Housing Regulator on consumer regulation.

We will continue to involve tenants from all across the town and respond to the findings of the regular STAR survey.

We will encourage council tenants to organise and promote the option of tenant management organisations, including co-operatives, under the Right to Manage.

An active programme of tenancy audits will ensure contact with 1800 tenants each year.

Rollout of Healthy Estates Strategy to improve external environments on council estates.

Housing services to be linked to our Child Friendly Town activities.

9. Supporting wellbeing

What do we hope to achieve?

Everyone in Luton can access homes which support their independence and wellbeing across the life course. Longer term needs of older people and people with disabilities or care needs are anticipated.

Where housing with support is required, this is planned well in advance and commissioned in partnership. Co-production supports good design and service delivery. Housing is a central part of tackling health inequalities and achieving Marmot Town status for Luton. The council will create opportunities for investment into specialised housing which meets local needs.

9.1 Current position

Housing is a significant determinant of good health. Good quality, secure and genuinely affordable housing is the basis from which residents can achieve their full potential. Indeed, for some people, access to the right accommodation and services can be a matter of life or death; and to assert their human rights.

The experience of the Covid-19 pandemic showed at a national level, and locally, that poor housing plays a large role in reducing wellbeing. This was supported by the findings of the Talk, Listen, Change project examining disproportionate impacts of Covid on ethnic minority communities in Luton. Some specialist needs grew during the Covid pandemic as a result of lockdowns and social isolation.

For some cohorts, specialist housing provision is an essential part of an independent and healthy life. The Social Care White Paper in November 2021 stated “every decision about care is also a decision about housing”. We currently have a range of specialist housing and services in the town in the town which address the needs of:

- children leaving care
- people living with physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, learning disabilities and mental ill-health
- migrants, refugees and people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)
- people experiencing or fleeing domestic abuse
- people with a history of offending behaviour
- people that have faced multiple exclusion and homelessness
- older people who are in need of some support

Our corporate commitment to children and young people and role as a corporate parent make housing provision for children leaving care an essential ongoing part of that responsibility.

A study by Campbell Tickell on behalf of the BLMK Transforming Care Partnership identified a likely additional demand of 98 units of specialist accommodation in Luton for people with learning disabilities between 2018 and 2023; primarily supported housing.

A study of older person’s housing needs in Luton indicated a requirement by 2030 of 711 specialist homes, comprising 134 age exclusive, 468 sheltered and 109 extra care homes.

Luton Council updated its Market Position Statement in 2021 which included a target to support people to live independently at home as long as sensibly possible, and to ensure that Luton has the right supply of appropriate housing and accommodation for its changing demographic.

The Housing Strategy will support the delivery of the Market Position Statement, especially in relation to reducing out of borough placements, supporting hospital discharge and providing aspirational independent living options which make the best use of land availability and new technology.

Respondents to our housing strategy consultation were very supportive of delivering specialist accommodation with over 40% saying this was a priority for the town.

9.2 Opportunities and challenges

We have been improving our joint working with Adult Social Care, Public Health and the NHS and this has improved the opportunity to meet physical and mental wellbeing outcomes through housing projects.

New commissioned services will be in place in 2023 which support a refresh of the accommodation offer for independent living, and improve the opportunity for partnerships.

Finding an appropriate aspirational housing offer for older people is a challenge but also presents an opportunity to free up family sized homes of all tenures and ensure that older people are part of new emerging neighbourhoods.

Respondents to our housing strategy survey supported the delivery of homes for older people (40%), people with disabilities (13%) and specialist housing (25%) of which demand for specialist housing for people with mental health needs was strongest.

We are building joint working with Children's Services to ensure better transitions for young people into independent living. We aim to provide improved support and training for tenancy sustainment and a commitment to care leavers to maintain a housing offer.

Our role as a landlord supports a range of specific client groups and broader wellbeing. For example, our Healthy Estates strategy, support for smoke free buildings and involvement in providing accommodation for housing first clients. Our adaptations service supports independent living across the town, helping people to live well at home.

We have an in-house assistive technology function which can act as a base for various additional services beyond a lifeline option. The digitalisation of all telecare in the next 5 years presents a very significant operational challenge which we need to prepare for, but provides a basis for extending services from a new digital platform.

Our multi-agency approach means that housing contributes to wider ambitions such as reducing reoffending, preventing domestic abuse and supporting survivors of abuse and exploitation.

We are an active partner within Luton's Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and are working towards Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation. This will improve our policies, practice and partnerships in respect of understanding and meeting the needs of people experiencing domestic abuse.

Luton has recently experienced a very dynamic population change which makes longer term demographic trends harder to predict. However, our most vulnerable residents are least likely to move out of the borough which means we can focus on the needs of service users known to us over the long term.

Collaboration with the voluntary sector and directly with the local community can help to shape services. The Fairness Taskforce has the potential to ensure that Luton is a truly equitable place which includes a better deal for people who may be more vulnerable or marginalised, including opportunities for younger people to access appropriate housing.

Housing is an essential element of our work to reduce health inequalities, which means that our activities create an opportunity to improve collaboration. Our work with the UCL Institute of Health Equity on becoming a 'Marmot Town' has pointed to an estimated 3,700 people in Luton experiencing unsatisfactory housing conditions, a figure which has doubled over ten years.

The review also highlighted the prevalence of privately rented homes and temporary accommodation, poor housing quality and cold homes as actively impacting on wellbeing in the town, meaning that work to tackle these problems will support our ambitions to improve health equity.

The focus on place, growth and tackling health inequalities from the newly established BLMK integrated care system provides a welcome opportunity to consider wellbeing as part of the built environment and learn from partners across the BLMK area.

9.3 Targets and priority actions

We will publish action plans setting out how we will identify appropriate sites near to facilities and deliver specialist accommodation to meet specialist needs; including people with Learning disabilities and autism, young people transitioning from Children's Services, care leavers, people with mental health and complex needs, and older people.

We will collaborate with partners on tenancy information and sustainment projects for young people leaving care.

We will support Children's Services in the provision of specialist step up and step down accommodation.

We will complete the programme of refurbishment of our sheltered housing schemes.

We will consult with tenants in sheltered housing as part of a review of staffing and services with options around more active on-site staffing with a broader role. These options will also be considered in light of HRA resources and the impact on costs to tenants.

We will increase partnership working with health services to target support in line with the frailty framework.

Satisfaction with adaptations at 95% or above.

We will work with partners including Adult Social Care to improve advice and information for older people about housing options, and explore all opportunities to develop specialist senior living accommodation, including extra care where required.

Delivery of specialist accommodation for mental health and complex needs.

ATS to be active in developing assistive technology options for people.

Achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation by 2023, and work closely with DA Board partners to tackle and respond to domestic abuse across the town.

We will collaborate with partners in the criminal justice system to support housing solutions to help reduce reoffending.

We will grow and commit to established and new partnerships which support the physical and mental wellbeing of residents.

10 Risk profile

The housing market is subject to external influences well beyond the reach of the council so there are elements of the strategy which will be subject to delivery risks.

Significant economic challenges which undermine local incomes for an extended time will likely exacerbate debt, arrears and homelessness, and put pressure on rent policies.

The rising cost of living – and in particular the cost of energy – is expected to have a very serious impact on household disposable incomes, living standards and business viability.

The council itself faces financial challenges including required savings for our temporary accommodation and homelessness provision, and pressure on the Housing Revenue Account for example reductions in rental income impacting long term investment capacity.

Covid-19 or other pandemic may remain a medium term risk which disrupts service provision, economic activity and wellbeing.

Supply chain and construction cost pressures could reduce the viability of developments, impacting on affordable housing delivery, broader housing costs and construction as a whole.

The relative benefits of building in Luton compared to other areas in the locality, in terms of the availability of construction land, house prices and construction costs could mean that delivery shifts to adjacent areas.

Government policies in relation to social security benefits, and eligibility for assistance, especially the rate of Local Housing Allowance in relation to actual local rents, could mean it's harder to secure long term accommodation for families in need of a home.

National and sub-regional planning policies and guidance may impact on our ability to attract appropriate development.

Technological changes including digitalisation of telephone line services, the availability of digital access and service changes will require the council to respond effectively to maintain good services, and adapt the technology offer to stay relevant.

The council's best means of responding to external challenges is to remain very clear about its ambitions and build ever stronger relationships with external partners. In terms of financial challenges, strict budget management and proactive work to improve efficiencies will be central to managing the risks.