

Report to Cabinet

4 December 2024

Subject:	Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy 2025 - 2030
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Housing & Sustainable Development Councillor Vicki Smith
Director:	Alan Lunt Executive Director of Place
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Assistant Director - Asset Management and Improvement, Sarah Ager Sarah_Ager@sandwell.gov.uk Housing Policy and Strategy Lead Officer, Louis Bebb louis_bebb@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

1.1 For the reasons set out in the report, it is recommended that:-

approval be given to the Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy 2025 – 2030.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 The aim of Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy in general is to guide the future shape and direction of the property assets to ensure that they meet corporate objectives and customer expectations.

2.2 This strategy sets out how we intend to address the key asset management and property compliance challenges affecting our communities over the next five years. It sets out the council's priorities and objectives for meeting housing need and working with tenants and residents to build sustainable and cohesive communities across the borough.

- 2.3 The key objective of the council’s Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy is to ensure that we utilise our assets in the most effective way for the benefit of both its existing and potential tenants and leaseholders.
- 2.4 The National Housing Federation definition of property asset management is:
‘Asset management is the range of activities undertaken to ensure that the housing stock meets the needs and standards for the future’.
 The principles of effective asset management therefore go beyond just investing in good repairs and improvements and must consider reviewing the overall asset base to ensure it achieves the right balance between need and quality.
- 2.5 The Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy 2025 - 2030 will help meet the needs identified in the council’s Housing Strategy, Housing Revenue Account 30 year Business Plan, Climate Change Strategy and Property Compliance Policy but also other emerging strategies and plans where housing has a part to play in meeting the needs and aspirations of our communities.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

<p>Growing Up in Sandwell</p>	<p>Good quality and suitable housing are essential to delivering this objective. For instance, the Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy will help to steer this objective by dealing with damp and mould – the health risks are particularly rife for young children who may have weakened immune systems, whereas being able to enjoy quality public spaces will provide a positive impact to their health and wellbeing. In addition, the Asset Management team will aim to support Children’s Services to make improvements to their own accommodation on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>The Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy meets this objective by considering the types of housing needed to support people at each life stage. The document particularly addresses the housing needs for older people within dwellings. Quality homes will have a positive impact on the lives of children and adults and help residents maintain their independence as they get older.</p>
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Living in Sandwell	The Strategy links directly to this priority in the Corporate Plan and expands on how we will deliver and shape future asset management investment and highlights the importance of raising standards of design, quality and sustainability across the Borough.
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	The Strategy outlines how we will lead our partners in Sandwell to make the most of all our assets and make long-term investment decisions that benefit our borough. In addition, the document outlines how we will work with local providers to ensure local spend also has green outcomes.
Healthy in Sandwell	Housing and the quality of the neighbourhood contribute to delivery of this objective. Sandwell has diverse communities made up of differing socio-economic status, race, ethnicity and disabilities. The document recognises Sandwell's responsibility to invest in housing assets within the Borough to promote wellbeing and help people live healthy lives - this will continue to create mixed and sustainable communities.

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy is an important document in setting out the council's priorities and objectives for meeting the housing asset needs of our communities.
- 4.2 This document is a key strategy in articulating what actions we will take to work towards maintaining and improving Sandwell's own HRA stock. An action plan has been developed to sit beneath the strategy.
- 4.3 This 2025-30 Strategy will replace the 2017-20 Asset Management Strategy which set out several priorities that remain highly relevant today, namely:
- Providing homes which will be more affordable to our customers.
 - Developing a more environmentally sustainable asset base.
 - Reducing the 'whole life' running costs of our properties.
 - Demonstrate value for money through collaborative procurement & partnerships.
 - Investing strategically in our homes and neighbourhoods.
 - Improving our financial strength so we deliver a sustainable programme of improvement.
 - Appropriately disposing of assets, enabling investment in new homes & reinvestment in existing homes.

- Create homes and neighbourhoods that meet our customers' needs and expectations both now and in the future.

4.6 We have engaged with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Charnwood Borough Council to discuss their own recent experiences in creating and implementing their own published Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy documents and what some of the challenges and lessons that have been learnt during and after this project. This has produced some really informative feedback through collaboration with other local authorities.

4.7 The key objectives of this strategy are:

- **Planning and service delivery:** Understanding our properties and tenants to drive constant performance improvement and innovation. Also, maximising choice for tenants on investment priorities and specification of components at replacement.
- **Modern homes and energy efficiency:** Providing homes which are warm, secure, high quality, energy efficient and affordable
- **Asset Compliance and Building Safety:** Ensuring our properties are safe, secure and compliant, meeting all our landlord obligations under current legislation, guidance and best practice.

4.8 Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy Workshops

Throughout May to October 2023, we carried out 6 feedback workshops with over 40 attendees to understand what our Asset Management and Compliance services currently look like and to establish the approach we need to address the key asset management challenges affecting our communities over the next five years. The consultation workshops included representation from both Asset and Housing Management staff, tenants and leaseholders and an elected member to understand what issues meant the most to them.

4.9 Summary of workshop feedback:

- Overall, support across the strategy document and action plan was relatively high, with a large proportion of the respondents either tending to agree or strongly agreeing with the strategy's overarching objectives.
- Generally, respondents felt that the document needs to acknowledge that there are a number of possible scenarios around asset investment with competing priorities. Whilst some investment is essential and non-discretionary (e.g. statutory compliance activity or

work to maintain Decent Homes), other investment is more discretionary.

- The strategy needs to show how we currently maintain our assets, and how we will invest in these in the future.
- National context and strategic context will help to set the narrative for readers and should be included, especially in the constantly changing world of policy and legislation.
- TLSG members in particular stated that the full document is not very resident friendly and that a summary version should be produced – this should be at least half the length of the full document.
- All workshop attendees felt anything proposed needs to be actionable and realistic.

4.10 Consultation

Public consultation on the draft Strategy ran for a 6-week period from 1st September until 13th October 2023. Two versions of the Strategy were uploaded to the online consultation page – the full version of the strategy and a summarised version for people interested in the key highlights.

We have shared the draft Strategy with various stakeholders including:

- SMBC members
- Shared via internal communications - newsletters, Elected Members updates
- Registered providers operating in and with an interest in Sandwell
- West Midlands local authorities
- Black Country Health and Housing Partnership
- Sandwell's Tenant and Resident Scrutiny Group
- Housing and advice organisations in the voluntary and community sector
- Homes England and the Regulator of Social Housing
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)
- Shared via housing forums and networks such as the Homelessness Forum, the West Midlands Housing Officer Group, and the Housing Partnership Forum

In total, we received **30** responses to the Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy public consultation (both online and through focus group events).

In the consultation survey, there was a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. A variety of public consultations have helped inform this strategy including:

- Public consultation on strategy – 26 responses

- Consultation events with Sandwell's Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group – 4 responses

4.11 Consultation Findings

In various feedback formats, quantitative and qualitative data has been gathered to help shape and inform the Sandwell Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy:

- The public consultation contained seven multiple choice questions – five relating to both the document's overall vision and strategic aims, one question in response to what is missing in the document and one question asking what the investment priorities should be over the lifespan of the strategy.
- Each question asked the respondent whether they agreed with a particular theme in the Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy, with options of 'strongly agree', 'somewhat agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'somewhat disagree' and 'strongly disagree'.
- Support across all questions was very high, with respondents either tending to agree or strongly agree with the priorities of the strategy. The average agreement was 81%, demonstrating a strong level of support for the aims of the Sandwell Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy overall.
- Across all the strategic aims of the strategy, the most well received amongst respondents was '*modern homes*' and '*planning and service delivery*', which generated an 88% agreeance overall.
- The response with the lowest level of support was the strategic aim around '*asset compliance and building safety*'. However, this was only slightly lower at 77%.

Within the public consultation, respondents were given the opportunity at the end of every priority, and for the strategy as a whole, to feedback anything they felt was missing or any point they particularly wanted to emphasise. This produced a range of responses, with a number of key words and phrases emerging repeatedly.

The top 5 phrases were:

- 1. Affordability** – respondents stressed the importance of affordable housing, highlighting the need for both quality and quantity.
- 2. Preservation** – there was concern expressed about Sandwell's open spaces, particularly as housing development continues to expand across the Borough.

3. Decarbonisation – this referred to respondents who want to improve the energy efficiency of our homes whilst supporting tenants in fuel poverty.

4. Safety – ensuring Sandwell Council homes are safe, secure and compliant and meeting all their landlord obligations implemented by central government.

5. Social housing – many replies were supportive of social housing as a way of meeting housing need, and in the compliant manner.

Detailed contributions and amendments:

The consultation also highlighted a number of additional suggestions which have been considered and adopted in the final strategy draft.

Response Received	Action Taken
Sandwell Council needs to compensate for the loss of Council houses that were sold off but not replaced.	Information regarding this is in our Housing Strategy 2023-2028 - 'Councils are set to retain 100% of right to buy receipts for two years'. Further, we will add an action ensuring that the money which the council retains from right to buy sales will then be used to fund the one-for-one replacement of the social housing stock sold off via the scheme.
Preserving green spaces and not using these for housing developments is essential.	Within our Planning and Service Delivery aims, there needs to be an explicit link between housing and greenspaces. The document also needs to link in with overarching priorities such as Sandwell's Climate Change Strategy. In addition, outlining commitments such as supporting the Greenspace Strategy Delivery Board.
Building more properties for the elderly. There are many people being the sole occupiers, because there are not enough properties being built with the elderly/disabled in mind.	Whilst funding is mentioned in relation to retrofit, funding within new builds isn't mentioned. Priorities 1 and 3 of our Housing Strategy 2023 - 2028 provide more detail in our aims and objectives around how we aim to acquire external funding for new build housing, for instance, elaborating on how we have said we will work with Homes England within future housing development.

<p>More focused education and energy efficiency awareness with incentives to move to net zero could be considered.</p>	<p>Action to be added to the third strategic aim and action plan outlining how we will explore incentives for both homeowners and households renting to move to carbon neutral facilities within their homes.</p>
<p>Building on brownfield sites regardless of costs. Not building on Green Spaces.</p>	<p>Within the Action Plan, more details will be provided on greenspaces. Particularly greater details on the opportunities for inward investment will include the West Midlands Brownfield Site Fund to deliver the challenges of bringing brownfield sites into development.</p>
<p>The advice given to residents on tackling persistent black mould is often described to as unclear. A number of residents have complained that the advice to 'wash it with bleach' isn't good enough as they feel the problem is structural.</p>	<p>It has been added into the Strategy that "As part of the improvement planning process, we will analyse our repair data to determine whether we have a particular issue in certain locations, or with a certain type of property. This may lead to a focussed investment to proactively deal with damp and mould in certain properties including investing in innovative solutions for ventilation and digital monitoring".</p>
<p>More social prescribing is needed – this should be mentioned within the document.</p>	<p>As part of social prescribing, housing officers are visiting properties to complete Homechecks. Whilst the trigger of these Homechecks is damp and mould, our housing officers take a holistic approach in order to identify any other issues that might possibly contributing to damp and mould in the home, including financial health, overcrowded homes and physical and mental health. This will be covered further in the Action Plan and Sandwell's future Damp and Mould Strategy.</p>

4.12 In addition, recommendations were also received from elected members around operational delivery when the strategy was presented to the

Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny (SNAC) Board on 26th September 2023. We will work to support these throughout the lifespan of the strategy:

- 1) Recommended a further review of the strategy, once more data had been collected.
- 2) Recommended that a summary of the strategy, once completed, be comprised to enable a digestible format.
- 3) Requested clarification on what consultation methods will be used and re-assurance that digitally excluded people will be included.
- 4) Recommended that information on the condition of properties from home checks should be centrally stored to assist in data collection
- 5) Recommended that an external funding strategy be available once we have received data detailing how much funding is required, where we will get the funding from and any associated timeframes.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 Not available.

6 Implications

Resources:	Delivery of the Strategy will be through existing resources including the Housing Revenue Account but is also based on being able to attract funding from external sources such as Homes England and West Midlands Combined Authority as well as Government funding towards retrofit of homes.
Legal and Governance:	<p>There are a variety of legal factors that have to be considered which underpin the strategy. For instance, there have been significant changes to our legal obligations which became law during 2021 because of the Fire Safety Act 2021 and the Building Safety Act 2022.</p> <p>The Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy Action Plan will provide oversight ensuring implementation of the Housing Strategy 2023-2028, including monitoring of the delivery of actions against the key objectives. Unless there are major legislative changes or significant service changes this strategy will be reviewed every five years.</p>

<p>Risk:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial resources available to deliver the strategy, including inflation. • Data quality (stock condition) in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the HRA assets and a robust evidence base on which to make informed decisions about future asset management investment. • Future changes to national policy and requirements (particularly on planning) that could impact on the Council's ability to deliver new housing that meets locally identified needs. For instance, Right to Buy proceeds, climate change and materials used for new homes and retrofits, etc.
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>The Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy is key to reducing housing related and wider inequalities and addressing the diverse housing needs of our communities.</p> <p><u>Age:</u> A strategic approach is necessary to meet the housing needs of Sandwell's older population. The document considers the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people will have improved supply of suitable and accessible homes where they in particular feel safe and can maintain independence for longer. <p><u>Disability:</u> The numbers of disabled people or those in poor health in Sandwell is significantly higher than the national average. Outlining our priorities for safe and well adapted housing is essential to help people remain independent if they experience health problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling the shortage of accommodation for people requiring disabled units. • Greater utilisation of Disabled Facilities Grants – this will provide more housing options and enable disabled residents to remain in their own home for longer. <p><u>Race:</u> The strategy will have an impact on ethnic minority groups in several ways. These households have distinct characteristics in terms of their housing needs which may leave them disadvantaged in some way.</p>

	<p>How the strategy will address this housing inequality is outlined below:</p> <p>Our Housing Strategy 2023-2028 commitment to 'make the best use of the homes we have' will benefit ethnic minority groups particularly. These households typically live in poorer housing conditions than white households.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>The proportion of those in poor health in Sandwell is significantly higher than the national average. With the significant health issues in the borough, we know the Strategy can play a key role in ensuring homes help people to maintain independence and quality of life. For instance, we will continue to improve our home adaptations service to enable people to remain at home if mobility becomes an issue and also work to provide new homes that are designed to be adaptable for changing health and mobility needs. In addition, we will aim to be as proactive as possible with ensuring we meet the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).</p>
Social Value:	<p>A large part of social value in this Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy is about creating communities in which people want to live and spend their time. Local areas that cover every need, providing access to all the necessary services and resources, and promoting greater wellbeing and satisfaction will provide social value. Through procuring services to maintain and improve council housing, social value considerations are built into the tendering process to maximise use of local labour, offer apprenticeships to local people and reduce climate change impacts. Additionally, engaging with Sandwell's tenants and residents e.g. through public consultation generates social value through interacting and empowering the community to help shape the Council's HRA asset aims and aspirations for the next 5 years.</p>
Climate Change:	<p>Housing and its additional assets plays a key role in addressing climate change due to its strong environmental impact. The document links to the council's Climate Change Strategy, based on the need to reduce carbon emissions from housing and ensure homes are well insulated. It outlines our commitment to identifying funding to help improve the energy efficiency of our own stock, build new homes</p>

	to carbon neutral standards and help tenants with the transition to a net zero carbon future.
Corporate Parenting:	The Asset Management team will aim to support Children's Services to make improvements to their own accommodation on a case-by-case basis.

7. Appendices

- Appendix 1: Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy 2025 - 2030
- Appendix 2: Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy 2025 – 2030 Consultation Report
- Appendix 3: Sandwell Council Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy Action Plan 2025 - 2030

8. Background Papers

- Sandwell's Housing Strategy 2023-2028
https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/34255/housing_strategy_2023_-_2028
- Sandwell Regeneration Strategy 2022-2027
<https://www.bigplansforsandwell.com/media/9575/sandwell-regeneration-strategy-2022-2027.pdf>
- Council Plan 2024-2027
<https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/download/960/council-plan>
- 2021 Census for England and Wales
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000028/>
- Climate Change Strategy 2020-2041
https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/31151/climate_change_strategy.pdf
- Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan 2023-2053
<https://sandwell.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s12434/05a%20Appendix%201%20Draft%20HRABusinessPlan%20100123.pdf>
- Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing Policy
https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/34372/adaptations_for_disabled_tenants_in_council_housing_policy_-_june_2023
- Building Safety Act 2022
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/30/contents/enacted>
- Fire Safety Act 2021
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-act-2021>
- Sandwell Property Compliance Policy
<https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/3389/property-compliance-policy>