

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

20 July 2026

Housing Strategy – Annual Review

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr G Taylor, Housing and Homelessness

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:

S Crowe - Executive Director, Housing, Prevention and Communities

Report author and job title: Sarah Smith – Interim Service Manager for Housing Strategy

Email: sarah.smith@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public [Choose an item.](#)

1. Executive summary

1.1 This report provides an overview of the actions taken to meet the aims and objectives set out in the Dorset Council Housing Strategy 2024-2029.

1.2 The Strategy (Appendix 1) was approved in December 2023. It is a high-level document that sets out our vision, aims, and objectives for housing in Dorset. It focuses on residents' needs, health and wellbeing, supporting rural communities, and protecting Dorset's natural environment, landscape, and heritage.

1.3 The Housing Strategy has four main objectives:

- Housing Need – Helping residents to live safe, healthy, and independent lives in homes that meet their needs.
- Housing Supply – Increasing the delivery of homes that people need and can afford.
- Housing Standards – Raising the quality, condition, and safety of homes.
- Prevention of Homelessness – Providing timely support to people in crisis to prevent homelessness.

1.4 As part of the Council's leadership review and goal to be a modern, sustainable unitary authority, the Housing Service is now an integral part of the new Housing, Communities and Prevention Directorate. Together with the creation of a new Housing Delivery Board, which strengthens the cross Council ownership for

meeting the Housing Strategy aims & objectives. The new directorate will provide emerging opportunities to embed closer working relationships with our Communities, Commissioning and Health partners. There is a growing requirement to align housing supply with Adult Social Care commissioning intentions, particularly in relation to supported living, extra care, and accommodation with support. Future delivery will need to respond to specific needs including people with learning disabilities, autism, mental health needs, and complex physical disabilities.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 To review progress in delivering the Housing Strategy and provide feedback and comments on the progress made and the work still to be done.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

3.1 To provide oversight and scrutiny to ensure the successful delivery of the Housing Strategy's aims and objectives.

4. The report

4.1 The Housing Strategy is a council-wide plan to ensure residents have access to affordable, suitable, and secure homes. The Home in on Housing (HIOH) programme plays a key role in achieving these aims, delivering over 130 work streams through defined projects and ongoing activities.

4.2 Resources: The HIOH Programme team was recruited in November 2024 and consists of a Programme Manager, a Project Manager, and two Home in on Housing Delivery Officers.

4.3 HIOH Governance Boards: The programme is overseen by a Housing Delivery Board (replacing the previous Officer Board and chaired by Jan Britton with Sam Crowe as Vice Chair) and an advisory Member Board supported by Task and Finish Groups.

4.4 Overview: The HIOH programme successfully launched phase one in January 2025.

4.5 Phase One – Research and Recommendations Phase

Phase one identified 14 projects, each requiring detailed research to provide insight and identify actions to meet the Strategy's aims. A key aim was to ensure future decisions are based on data, reflect local needs, and consider national trends and best practice. Detailed recommendation reports have been completed for 12 of the 14 projects, supported by Task and Finish Groups.

The two projects not yet finalised are:

- Principal Residence – Reviewed by a Task and Finish Group in May 2026. It will be among the first reports to be presented to the new Housing Board.
- Data and Insight – Delayed due to technical resource pressures. The first dashboard is in development and due for delivery by mid-July 2026.

Phase 2 is underway, and 16 Phase 3 projects have been approved and are starting now.

4.6 Phase One – Projects and Outcomes

4.6.1 Accessible Housing Policy (Appendix 2)

The report reviewed existing data, strategies, and policies relating to homes for older and disabled people. It found no legal requirement for a standalone accessible housing strategy but confirmed strong existing strategic commitment. It recommended that Housing, Adults, and Children's services engage with the Local Plan to ensure accessible design requirements are included. Recommendations were approved and officers are now working with Planning colleagues to take this forward.

4.6.2 Affordable Housing Info and Guidance (Appendix 3)

Following feedback from residents during the Housing Strategy consultation, the report recommended the language Dorset Council should use when communicating about affordable housing. Following public engagement, a report was produced identifying our resident's preferred language. A Member Task and Finish Group gave full support in February 2026, and the recommendations were approved. These will be delivered through Phase 3 and language changes are already being implemented by the Communities and Engagement service.

4.6.3 Affordable Housing Targets (Appendix 4)

The report improved understanding of how affordable housing targets are set and established new targets. In 2025/26, 423 homes were delivered against a target of 450. Shortfalls were due to weather-related delays at Bridport, Marnhull and Crossways, and site-specific delays at Royal Mannor, Portland (41 homes) and Holly Court, Weymouth (37 homes). The target for 2026/27 is 500 homes, with a proposed increase of 50 homes per year for the next five years, reviewed every two years.

4.6.4 Brownfield Sites (Appendix 5)

The report provided a detailed analysis of brownfield sites and identified seven actions to support affordable home delivery, including assessing six co-owned sites and three fully owned sites for New Models of Housing Delivery projects. A single tracking system was recommended. Delivery of recommendations sits with the Planning service, pending Local Plan work. The HIOH programme will monitor progress.

4.6.5 Data Insight and Development

This project aims to develop an interactive data set to identify housing needs, predict future trends, and evaluate the impact of initiatives. Progress has been delayed due to resource pressures. The first dashboards are in development and have received positive feedback from the Commissioning Service. Delivery is expected by mid-July 2026.

4.6.6 Dorset Private Landlords (Appendix 6)

The report reviewed Dorset Council's support packages for private landlords and benchmarked them against neighbouring councils. Whilst financial incentives are competitive, landlords were unclear about how to access them. Four improvement areas were identified: awareness and access to support; landlord engagement and communication; support for property adaptations; and data monitoring. Actions are being delivered through the HIOH and Housing Programme, many linked to the Renters' Rights Act.

4.6.7 Empty Homes

Dorset Council's first Empty Homes Strategy was developed and adopted by Full Council. Two dedicated empty homes officers are now in post. In 2025/26, 27 properties were returned to use through direct action – up from 16 in 2024/25. Over half were identified proactively from Council Tax lists, demonstrating a strong preventative approach. The strategy is supported by capital funding enabling Compulsory Purchase Orders as a sanction. The team is currently targeting four CPO cases, with one already in progress.

4.6.8 Grant Funding (Appendix 7)

The report identified opportunities to increase access to external grant funding. It recommended a central Grantfinder subscription to identify opportunities as they arise, and closer collaboration between departments to maximise funding. Work to implement these actions is ongoing.

4.6.9 Housing Register Downsizing Initiative (Appendix 8)

The report found that under-occupancy in social housing in Dorset is higher than previously thought. It recommended matching under-occupying households with those in housing need, including matching downsizers with overcrowded households, and those in adapted homes they no longer need with those who require adaptations. This is expected to reduce waiting times and make better use of existing stock.

4.6.10 Move-On Accommodation (Appendix 9)

The report identified gaps and inconsistencies in housing advice and move-on pathways from supported accommodation, as well as barriers to accessing private

rented accommodation. Recommendations fell into five areas: strategic direction; data and outcomes monitoring; pathways and move-on planning; housing supply and allocations; and private rented sector options. There is an opportunity to develop clearer ASC-aligned pathways, including step-down from high-cost care settings and hospital discharge routes into supported accommodation. Many actions are being addressed through the new Supported Housing Strategy (Phase 2), with remaining actions in Phase 3.

4.6.11 New Models of Housing Delivery

The report was presented to Cabinet in March 2025 and recommended five delivery models: temporary accommodation; specialist accommodation using Council land; settled accommodation for housing register applicants; a development partnership with Registered Providers; and use of Homes Dorset. Temporary and specialist accommodation models were approved. Cabinet endorsed the approach on the remaining models and requested detailed reports, which are being progressed in Phase 2.

Link to Cabinet decision and report -

<https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=4996>

4.6.12 Principal Residence (Appendix 10)

The report provides feedback on principal residence policy decisions from other local authorities. It recommends maintaining the Council's current position and continuing to use second home council tax levies to manage second home ownership. The report was reviewed by a members Task and Finish Group in May 2026 and will be presented to the Housing Board before going to the full Member Board.

4.6.13 Registered Provider Comparative Research – Strategy and Policy

The research highlighted inconsistencies in policies and strategies among registered providers in Dorset. This data will be used to develop key performance indicators to assess provider performance, supporting the Registered Provider Performance project in Phase 3.

4.6.14 UK Shared Prosperity Fund

A feasibility study explored the creation of a ring-fenced Local Housing Fund. The report recommended working within the First Homes scheme framework to increase delivery, reduce the impact on S106 social housing, and improve discounts for target households. The fund was to be supported through the devolution deal; without that funding, no further action can be taken at this stage.

4.7 Phase Two

Phase two shifts focus from research to active delivery.

4.8 Phase 2 Projects and Updates

4.8.1 Temporary Accommodation Lease Model

This model responds to the need to reduce reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation, which is generally unsuitable for families and creates avoidable financial pressure. The proposal is to lease up to 100 self-contained homes, including accessible, one-bedroom, and family-sized properties – providing better-quality accommodation with improved control over standards and location. The project is approved but is currently subject to financial due diligence on the proposed lessor. Active delivery of new accommodation is expected within 2026.

4.8.2 Settled Accommodation Lease Model

This larger-scale proposal aims to secure up to 400 homes per year for three years for households whose needs are not met by existing affordable housing or the private rented sector. Priority groups include care leavers, young people at risk of homelessness, those requiring adapted homes, and those with urgent housing need. The project is in the options and assurance stage, with specialist legal advice commissioned. A preferred delivery route, including the potential use of Homes Dorset, will be brought to Cabinet.

4.8.3 Development Partnership Model

This medium to long-term model would use Council land to create a pilot programme of up to six sites with registered providers, seeking social rent wherever possible. It addresses the mismatch between current delivery and housing register need, particularly for one-bedroom homes, larger family homes, bungalows, and accessible properties. The project has been paused and reframed to align with the Council's wider asset strategy. Housing and Assets and Property are now progressing the report jointly, with a return to Cabinet expected in the latter half of 2026.

4.8.4 Asset-Led Development Model

This model focuses on small, complex, or vacant Council assets that could deliver high social value for specific households, such as care leavers, those needing adapted homes, or supported housing. It provides a significant opportunity to deliver bespoke supported living schemes on small sites, aligned to Adult Social Care commissioning priorities and enabling people to live independently in community-based settings. A pilot using two small land sites and two vacant properties is intended, supported by an external provider with development and grant-funding expertise. Phase 1 viability work is underway, and the Procurement Initiation Document has been signed off.

4.8.5 Homes Dorset

Homes Dorset is a private company wholly owned by Dorset Council, incorporated in 2018 as a potential housing delivery vehicle. Cabinet requested an options appraisal, which has been completed. The report is linked to the Settled Accommodation Lease Model, as decisions on corporate structure may determine whether Homes Dorset becomes the delivery vehicle for part of that programme.

4.8.6 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan

In line with the National Plan to End Homelessness, a consultant has been instructed to carry out a full needs assessment and co-produce a new strategy with key stakeholders, fully funded through the Homelessness Prevention Grant. A revised Action Plan will be published in Autumn 2026, with the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy due in July 2027.

4.8.7 Supported Housing Strategy

The Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act requires all local authorities to produce a Supported Housing Strategy by 31 March 2027. Dorset has received £55,409 in New Burdens Funding for 2025/26. Housing LIN has been commissioned to carry out a needs assessment and develop a first draft through co-production with specialist groups and stakeholders.

4.9 Phase 3

Phase 3 comprises 16 projects in the early stages of scoping and development, with the majority starting late summer 2026. Projects will deliver on the recommendations from Phase 1 reports and include a review of the Housing Strategy in preparation for a new version when the current strategy expires in 2029.

4.10 Delivery Summary: Where the Strategy is Delivering and Where Focus is Needed

The following summary is provided to assist Scrutiny Members in assessing overall progress against the Housing Strategy's four objectives.

Areas of Strong Delivery:

- **Empty Homes (Housing Supply):** The adoption of Dorset's first Empty Homes Strategy and the appointment of two dedicated officers have delivered immediate results. 27 properties were returned to use in 2025/26, up from 16 in 2024/25, through a proactive approach combining advice, incentives, and the credible use of Compulsory Purchase Orders.
- **Programme Delivery and Evidence Base (All Objectives):** 12 of 14 Phase 1 research projects have been completed and approved through governance, providing a strong, data-driven foundation for future housing decisions. Task and Finish Groups have ensured effective member engagement throughout.

- Governance and Partnership (All Objectives): The creation of the Housing, Communities and Prevention Directorate and the Housing Delivery Board strengthens accountability and enables closer working with health, commissioning, and communities' partners.
- Accessible Housing (Housing Need and Standards): Recommendations to embed accessible design requirements into the Local Plan have been approved, ensuring future homes better meet the needs of older and disabled residents.
- Affordable Housing Delivery (Housing Supply): 423 affordable homes were delivered in 2025/26, with delivery increasing year-on-year since the formation of Dorset Council, supported by strong registered provider partnerships.

Areas for Improvement and Focus:

- Affordable Housing Targets (Housing Supply): 423 homes were delivered against a target of 450 in 2025/26. Whilst delays were largely outside the Council's control, focus is needed to meet the new 500-home target for 2026/27 and the proposed year-on-year increases.
- Data Insight and Development (All Objectives): The delayed data dashboards are critical for monitoring housing need and evaluating the impact of the Strategy. Delivery of the first dashboard by mid-July 2026 is a priority.
- Temporary Accommodation Lease (Homelessness Prevention and Housing Supply): Completing financial due diligence and completing contract arrangements and property acquisition procedures must be prioritised to reduce reliance on costly bed and breakfast placements.
- Settled Accommodation (Housing Supply and Housing Need): Completing financial and taxation due diligence and presenting the options to Cabinet must be delivered to enable the delivery of homes that meet the needs of our residents with the most urgent need to move.
- Development Partnership (Housing Supply and Housing Need): Presenting a Housing and Asset & Property co-authored options paper to Cabinet is essential to delivering new homes on Council land at social rent rates that meet the needs of our residents.
- Asset-Led Models (Housing Supply): Appointing a provider is essential to unlock Council land for specialist housing delivery.
- Private Landlord Engagement (Housing Standards and Housing Need): Raising awareness of available support packages and access to useful information is a priority. Continuing engagement and communication with landlords, building on the actions already delivered to engage and inform them about Renters' Rights Act, is needed to retain landlords and improve standards.
- Move-On and Supported Housing Pathways (Homelessness Prevention and Housing Need): Gaps in move-on pathways from supported accommodation

have been identified. The new Supported Housing Strategy and Phase 3 projects must address these to improve outcomes for vulnerable residents.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 During the scoping, research and development stages of every project we consider potential alternative options and choose the ones that most meet the aims and objectives of the strategy.

6. Legal considerations

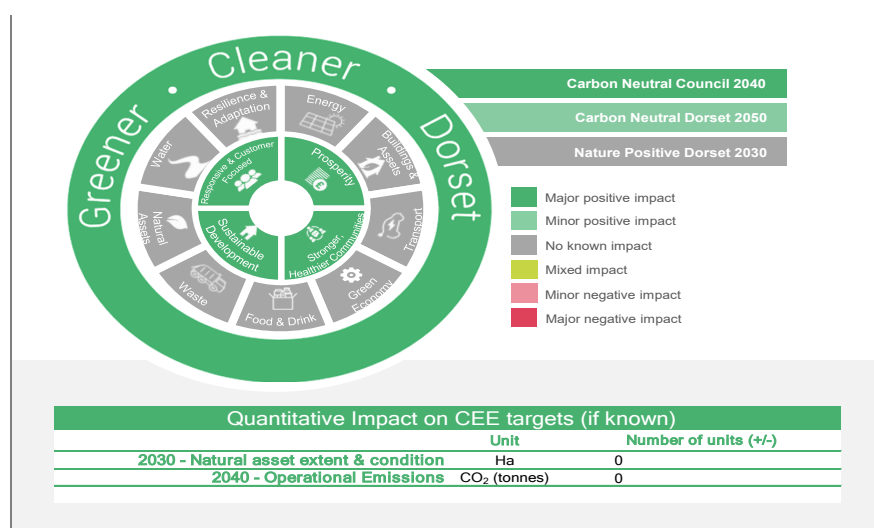
6.1 Many of the projects require detailed legal advice, support and oversight. Where specialist knowledge has been needed, our Legal Services have sought advice from external experts.

7. Financial implications

7.1 The programme is running within budget with minimal expenditure, outside of grant funded spend.

8. Natural environment, climate and ecology implications

8.1 Overall, the strategy seeks to have a positive impact by supporting improving standards of existing homes and the delivery of houses which are energy efficient, meet accessible housing standards, and the actions set out in the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecological Strategy.



ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact

Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact

Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Prosperity	strongly supports it
Stronger healthier communities	strongly supports it
Sustainable Development & Housing	strongly supports it
Responsive & Customer Focused	strongly supports it

9. Well-being and health implications

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9.1 Housing quality has a significant impact on both physical and mental health, with people who live in poor quality homes experiencing more ill health. Inadequate housing contributes to health inequalities, particularly affecting people on lower incomes and the most vulnerable.

9.2 As well as the condition of housing, the health impact includes overcrowding and whether homes meet the physical needs of occupants. Concerns about security of tenure, bills, and the threat of homelessness have all been shown to negatively impact health, especially for children.

9.3 By focussing on prevention, improving the condition and standards of existing homes, meeting specific property needs, and ensuring future developments support health, we can create healthy and thriving communities.

10. Other implications

10.1 None

11. Risk implications

11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

12. Equalities

12.1 See Appendix 11

13. Appendices

- 13.1
 - 1. Housing Strategy
 - 2. Accessible Housing Policy
 - 3. Affordable Housing Information
 - 4. Affordable Housing Targets
 - 5. Brownfield Sites
 - 6. Dorset Private Landlords
 - 7. Grant Funding
 - 8. Housing Register Downsizing Initiative
 - 9. Move-On Accommodation
 - 10. Principal Residence Policy
 - 11. EQIA

14. Background papers

14.1

15. Report sign-off

- 15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)