



Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils

# HOMES AND HOUSING STRATEGY



2024



## Introduction

We all need and deserve somewhere to live and call home. Having a place to call our own provides belonging, contributes to positive health and well-being, and strengthens community spirit.

Housing is a core thread which runs through the council's work, overlapping across other key areas including economic development, climate change, equality and inclusion and safe and sustainable neighbourhoods.

Local Housing Authorities are responsible for working to meet the housing needs of local residents. This is a wide remit, ranging from tackling homelessness to delivering new affordable housing to overseeing housing standards in the district.

Our housing vision is for residents to live in affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.

Ensuring we have enough homes of the right type and in the right place is critically important. Our strategy therefore focuses on ways to improve the quality, choice and supply of homes for current and future households.



## Vision

"Our vision is for residents to live in affordable, high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities."

# Themes & Priorities

Our Joint Homes and Housing Strategy is divided into two distinct areas of focus, allowing us to better address the varied responsibilities of the Local Housing Authority. Each theme encompasses several priorities, all contributing to the overarching vision of the Strategy:

**1**

## **Theme 1: Shaping the Housing Market within the districts.**

### **Priorities:**

1. Providing homes that are as affordable as possible through an effectively functioning housing market
2. Making best use of private sector land and private accommodation across the districts

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## **Theme 2: Being an effective social landlord.**

### **Priorities:**

1. Investing in our current homes
2. Tackling and adapting to climate change
3. Delivering new council housing
4. Improving the services that we provide to our tenants
5. Improving the neighbourhoods that we manage
6. Involving tenants in the running of the service
7. Implementing digital transformation
8. Ensuring sustainable financial management of our council housing services

# Key Facts - Setting the scene - Background information:

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts are predominantly rural areas comprising approximately 200 parishes, each one a local community with a unique identity and network of connections to each other. Across the districts there are many outstanding natural and built environments providing places and spaces which offer an excellent work and life balance –for residents, commuters, visitors, small business start-ups, entrepreneurs or large multinational companies.

The market towns of Sudbury (60 miles northeast of London) in Babergh and Stowmarket in Mid Suffolk are the largest centres of population in the districts. Connections to the Midlands and London are excellent with rail travel to London just over 90 minutes from the northernmost boundary of Mid Suffolk.

Both districts have an older-than-average population; In June 2022, 25.3% of residents in Mid Suffolk and 27% of residents in Babergh were over 65 years old; compared to 18.6% nationally. By 2043, the proportion of residents aged 65 years and over is expected to account for almost a third (32.4% Mid Suffolk and 33.8% Babergh) of all residents, well above the projected proportion for England (22.2%). As a population ages there will be increasing and different demands on services and facilities, especially housing, transport, medical care, and social care services.

Across both districts median house prices are around 8 to 11 times above the median earnings of residents (10.72 for Babergh and 8.93 for Mid Suffolk), making rural parts of the districts unaffordable for many to buy, especially younger and first-time households. This means an increase in demand for affordable housing options and private rented accommodation.

This Strategy sets out how the housing needs of residents across both districts will be met by the Councils, our partners, and key housing stakeholders to ensure our communities continue to thrive.

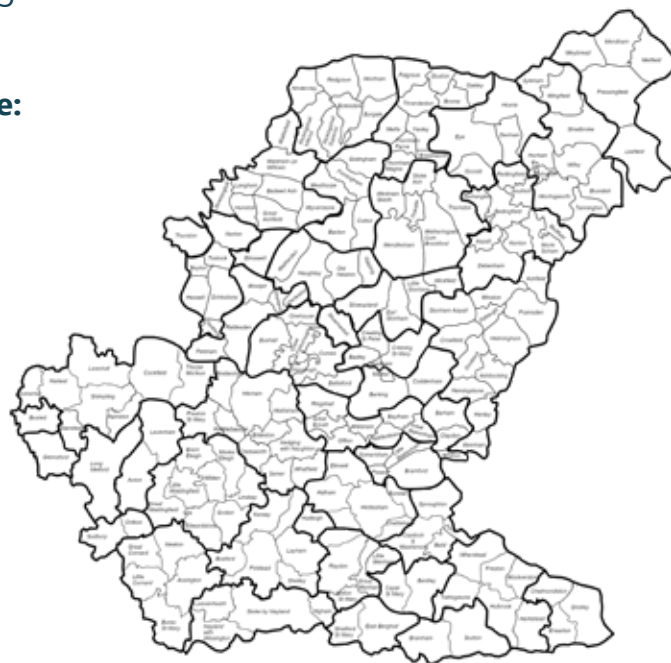
**For more detailed information and analysis please see:**

**Babergh: State of the District Report 2024:**

[babergh-state-of-the-district-2024](#)

**Mid Suffolk: State of the District Report 2024:**

[mid-suffolk-state-of-the-district-2024](#)



# National and Local Context:

Much of the way in which housing services are delivered is governed by legislation and national or local policies. Significant key events affect delivery and provide challenges as well as opportunities.

The following have, and will continue to have, an impact on Housing and Housing Services:



## Climate Emergency

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils declared a Climate Emergency in 2019; An Environment and Climate Change Task Force has since been established to address the climate challenge the districts face. We have been given a target of 2030 to meet the Government's Clean Growth Strategy, which sets an ambition to upgrade all Social Housing to an energy performance rating of at least C. The Government has also set a target for all new homes to be "net zero" in relation to carbon emissions by 2030.

## The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023

The Social Housing Regulation Act received Royal Assent in July 2023. The Act forms a new era of regulation for the social housing sector, aiming to give tenants greater powers and improve access to quick and fair solutions to problems.



## Joint Local Plan

The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (JLP) Part 1 Development Plan Document (November 2023) sets out a planning framework to guide development and facilitate growth in the Districts over the long term. It will play an important role in shaping our future – how towns and villages develop, how we protect and enhance our natural environment, develop our local economy, improve leisure and visitor facilities, improve social infrastructure and support more sustainable forms of travel.

The JLP can be found here: [babergh-and-mid-suffolk-joint-local-plan-part-1](#)

## The Building Safety Act 2022

The Building Safety Act 2022 was introduced in the wake of safety concerns for occupants of high-rise buildings after the 2017 Grenfell Tower tragedy. The legislation is intended to improve the design, construction and management of higher-risk buildings. It came into force on the 1st April 2023.



## Decent Homes Standard

The Decent Homes Standard sets the minimum standards for council owned homes. The government launched a further review of the Decent Homes Standard in June 2023. This review will consider a range of changes to the standard including whether the current Decent Homes Standard sets the right standard on damp and mould to keep residents safe.

## Rural districts

Suffolk has double the national average of people resident in rural areas and this rural population is older (higher percentage of those aged 65+) than its urban population.

An All-Party Parliamentary Group inquiry into rural housing showed

- People living in very rural areas, like ours, experience more limited social networks, isolation, and loneliness which can be exacerbated by poor transport.
- There is an urgent need to provide affordable housing for people wanting to live and work in the most rural communities



## Our Plan for Babergh

Our Plan for Babergh: A more resilient and sustainable future for Babergh: This sets out the opportunities and challenges that will be focused on in the period 2023-2027:

- Revitalised and improved Environment
- Thriving Economy
- Resilient Communities

Our Plan for Babergh can be found here: [our-plan-for-babergh](#)

## The Mid Suffolk Plan:

The Mid Suffolk Plan: Helping to create thriving and resilient communities in Mid Suffolk: This sets out the priorities and approach of Mid Suffolk District Council for the period 2023 - 2027. Focusing on:

- Housing and Infrastructure
- Resilience
- Community and Wellbeing
- Environmental Sustainability
- The Mid Suffolk Plan can be found here: [the-mid-suffolk-plan](#)



## Joint Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy

This strategy sets the key areas we will be focussing on to improve the lives of residents within our Districts. Our priorities for 2024 – 2029 are:

- Early upstream prevention & intervention.
- Making rough sleeping rare, brief and non -recurring.
- Ensuring the health and wellbeing needs of households are met whilst in temporary accommodation.
- Expanding and future-proofing the role and remit of Central Suffolk Lettings to continue to improve access to the private rented sector.
- Mitigating against the impacts of the cost of living

The Joint Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy can be found here: [homelessness-reduction-and-rough-sleeping-strategy-2024-2029](#)

## Cost of Living Action Plan

The Cost-of-Living Crisis Action Plan brings together a suite of measures that focus on maximising income, accessing advice, food insecurity and poverty, fuel poverty and Health and Wellbeing.

The action plan can be found here: [Cost of Living Action Plan](#)



## Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

The Councils have produced and developed a 30-year housing revenue account business plan. The plans consider how much money we expect to receive from rents and other sources, and how we will spend that money. There is a focus on maximising income and gaining efficiencies to ensure we deliver the very best value for money.



# ONE Theme

Shaping the housing  
market within the districts



As a local authority we have a range of duties and wider interests in ensuring the most effective functioning of our local housing markets. We want to ensure affordable, appropriate, good quality housing for residents within thriving and sustainable communities.

Data from the 2021 Census shows that a higher proportion of households in Babergh and Mid Suffolk owned their home outright (**43.4% and 43.2%**) than across Suffolk (**38.6%**), the East of England (**34.6%**) and England (**32.5%**). The most recent census also showed that although a lower proportion of households were renting privately in Babergh (**15.0%**) and Mid Suffolk (**13.8%**), this still equated to around **6,000** private-rented households in each district.

Both districts have an older than average population and by 2043, the proportion of residents aged 65 years and over is expected to account for almost a third (**32.4%**) of all residents, well above the projected proportion for England (**22.2%**). This is a faster increase than the growth of the population as a whole, meaning that older people will form a much larger proportion of the total population. An ageing population means we must continue to respond to the changing needs of older people and those who have specific complex needs.

House prices and rent levels have both increased significantly since the Homes and Housing Strategy was first adopted in 2019, and the cost-of-living crisis has reduced the amount of income which households have to cover housing costs.

On the 1st August 2024 there were **972** households registered on Gateway to Homechoice for rehousing in Babergh and **848** households registered for rehousing in Mid Suffolk. Of these, **527** households in Babergh and **418** households in Mid Suffolk are in priority bands A-C, meaning that they are in housing need. Of the total households registered (Bands A-F), **523** households in Babergh and **441** households in Mid Suffolk require 1 bedroom accommodation.

In 2020 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils established Central Suffolk Lettings (CSL) with the aim of increasing access to good quality homes in the private rented sector for eligible residents. CSL is a private rented sector lettings and rent guarantee scheme. CSL have been instrumental in improving relations with the private rented sector and are now fully operational in the sector and offer private landlords an alternative to using a high street letting agency. CSL are working with investors and private landlords on new housing developments and conversions to increase the supply of private rented accommodation in the districts.

The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (Part 1) Development Plan Document was adopted by both Councils in November 2023 and provides a framework for shaping our communities - and guiding future development - until the year 2037.

We aim to continue to facilitate opportunities for a mix of new homes which local people can afford, additionally support people with identified specific needs and actively support community representatives wanting to help residents create sustainable, thriving places to live; in line with the aspirations set out in Our Plan for Babergh and the Mid Suffolk Plan.

Both Councils are determined to show the sort of leadership required to encourage the delivery of new homes of the right type and tenure, in the right places and at a price that people can afford. We intend to make the most of every opportunity available to work with our partners and stakeholders in seeking new and imaginative ways to do just this.

This strategy sets out what our priorities are within this theme, what we have already achieved and the actions we will be taking next to contribute towards achieving the vision of this Joint Homes and Housing Strategy.

# Priority One:

## Providing homes that are as affordable as possible through an effectively functioning housing market

### Why this is a priority:

This Strategy recognises the growing numbers of households with a current affordable housing need within the districts. We therefore want to ensure that our limited resources are focussed on where we can have the most impact. By understanding the market better, we can see where our interventions could have a positive effect and avoid waste, duplication and cost.

Places with a mix of housing types, tenures and sizes are better able to meet the changing needs and aspirations of residents as they move through different life stages, changes of income and changing household numbers. We are keen to enable greater housing choice in local housing markets as it increases the opportunities for households to remain within their communities promoting social equity and inclusion by reducing geographical constraints on the search for the 'right house in the right place'.

### What we have already achieved:

- Adopted a Joint Local Plan 'Part 1' which provides clear policies and direction to all involved with development, enables housing needs to be met and is supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- Completed an update to the Accommodation Needs Assessment for Gypsies, Travellers, Travelling Show people and Boat Dwellers in order to inform the forthcoming Joint Local Plan Part 2 in allocating sites for development (if required).
- Developed and consulted on an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document prior to adoption.

### **What we will be focusing on next:**

- Determining how the Councils can identify and bring forward land to increase the supply of self-build plots
- Working with partners to produce an enhanced affordable housing stock database
- Updating the published Infrastructure Delivery Plan to ensure that the necessary infrastructure to support the Joint Local Plan can be delivered
- Setting out recommendations for what steps the Councils can take to provide additional support for the delivery of Community Led Housing
- Developing the Joint Local Plan Part 2 through the plan-making process
- Monitoring and reviewing the Housing Markets within the districts to aid understanding and decision -making

### **What success will look like:**

**A wide and varied choice of good quality, sustainable homes of different sizes, types and tenures, to meet the needs of a wide range of different households.**

# Priority Two:

## Making best use of private sector land and private sector accommodation across the districts

### Why this is a priority:

The private rented sector remains the second largest tenure in England. In 2022-23 it accounted for 19% of households, and it has grown in the last 20 years across all age groups. We want to encourage a housing sector that has the optimum levels, of all types, of tenure that meet the needs of residents. Compared to social and open market homes, housing costs are particularly high in the private rented sector where the majority of low-income households spend at least but often more than 31% of their income on rent. This has been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis.

In Babergh and Mid Suffolk we intend to continue to support a well-managed and flexible private rented sector as it offers those looking for flexible, shorter term accommodation additional options in most parishes. However, we know we must understand more about this sector and their occupiers if we are to fully understand the challenges and opportunities to optimise good quality, affordable private rental accommodation which meets expectations in this part of the housing market.

We will ensure housing meets standards set, where there is evidence of substandard accommodation we will incentivise or when necessary, take appropriate enforcement action to ensure owners comply and residents in our districts can access private rented accommodation of an acceptable standard.

### What we have already achieved:

- Established Central Suffolk Lettings with the aim of increasing access to good quality homes in the private rented sector
- Established a Landlords Forum, to advise and assist landlords in respect of legal responsibilities, grant availability and Universal Credit, to build better relationships and increase access to the private rented sector.
- Taken active part in the Suffolk-wide Private Rented Sector Pathfinder Programme to improve conditions for tenants
- Adopted an Empty Homes Policy and comprehensive toolkit to reduce the number of long-term empty properties in the districts and turn empty homes into safe and secure places to live

### **What we will be focusing on next:**

- Producing a brief to clarify and commission further research into the role of the Private Rented Sector in preventing and relieving homelessness in Babergh and Mid Suffolk.
- Reviewing our approach to HMO and HMO licensing and developing a targeted approach to engaging with a broader range of properties.
- Ensuring that we are ready for the implementation of the Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act.
- Reviewing the current system of Grants to Private Landlords to maximise opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and the energy efficiency of homes.

### **What success will look like:**

**An increase in access to good quality homes in the private rented sector.**

# Theme **TWO**

## Being an effective social landlord





The past few years have seen some of the most significant events in social housing, with the Grenfell fire tragedy in 2017 highlighting the inadequacy of social housing and the lack of tenant involvement and empowerment. The Government published the Social Housing Green Paper: A New Deal for Social Housing in 2018 and the Social Housing White Paper: The Charter for Social Housing Residents in 2020 all with the aim of improving how social housing is regulated.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 consolidates a stronger and more proactive regulatory regime to drive up standards in social housing and hold landlords to account for the services they provide to their tenants. Alongside this The Building Safety Act 2022 introduces legislation to improve the design, construction and management of higher-risk buildings.

The Act has given the Regulator of Social Housing more tools and powers to assess how well social housing landlords in England are doing at providing good quality homes and services. As of 1st April 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing has implemented a new consumer regulation regime, introducing a proactive approach to landlord inspections, introduced tenant satisfaction measures and an updated set of consumer standards. The new regime aims to put requirements in place to keep tenants safe in their homes, give them a voice, and respond promptly to address problems.

Tenant satisfaction measures are intended to make landlords' performance more visible to tenants, and help tenants hold their landlords to account. There are 22 tenant satisfaction measures, covering five themes. Ten of these will be measured by landlords directly, and 12 will be measured by landlords carrying out tenant perception surveys.

We have recently reviewed and revised our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan. The HRA is a ringfenced pot of money that is used solely for council-owned housing. All rent and service charge income goes into it, and all expenditure (management, maintenance etc) comes out of it. The HRA Business Plan sets out our strategic plan for managing and maintaining our social housing stock. It details our short to medium term plans and priorities for the housing and asset management services (5 years) and provides a long term (30 year) forecast on stock investment and financial planning. It is a key document which sets out how the housing service is delivered and defines priorities for investment.

The Decent Homes Standard, which sets minimum standards for the condition of social homes, has been under review for several years and plans to introduce a new Decent Homes Standard are progressing. When introduced, this standard has the potential to have significant financial implications for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils as Social Housing landlords.

From 2035, all homes in the Social Rented Sector must meet a specified level of energy efficiency (Energy Performance Certificate Level C). As a Social landlord, we are undertaking energy efficiency programmes to achieve this.

This strategy sets out what our priorities are within this theme, what we have already achieved and the actions we will be taking next to contribute towards achieving the vision of this Joint Homes and Housing Strategy.

# Priority One:

## Investing in our current homes

### Why this is a priority?:

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are landlords to 7,090 homes (Babergh 3,591 and Mid Suffolk 3,499 as at August 2024). The rental income generated by these homes is approximately £42.7 million each year. These funds are ringfenced to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and are dedicated to the management of our landlord service, maintenance of council homes and building more council homes.

To ensure we invest the resources we have in the right place at the right time we need to utilise stock condition, demand and needs data, along with local intelligence to make decisions on future investment and disposals.

### What we have already achieved:

- Completed 75% of the Stock Condition Survey
- Implemented a new team structure in the Repairs Service and Assets & Compliance Service
- Invested in new technology to help us deliver a more efficient repairs service

### What we will be focusing on next:

- Developing a ten-year Capital Investment Programme (2024 – 2034), to accurately predict where investment needs to take place, which will enable us to inform tenants of exactly what improvements they can expect and when these will take place.
- Completing 100% stock condition surveys to help us understand our stock and develop accurate programmes of work
- Implementing a programme of upgrades to heating systems in council stock: replacing oil systems wherever possible and prioritising heat pumps and gas boilers where appropriate.
- Developing an Asset Register, informed by current Stock Condition Survey, to help decisions on our future stock profile.
- Developing a Disposals Policy to set out the framework under which the poorest or worst performing stock would be redeveloped or sold.

### What success will look like:

**Our Council Housing Stock is fully compliant with the Decent Homes Standard, satisfaction with our repairs service improves, our tenants feel safe in their homes and we're making best use of our limited resources.**

# Priority two:

## Tackling and adapting to climate change

### **Why this is a priority?:**

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils declared a Climate Emergency in 2019; We have been given a target of 2030 to meet the Government's Clean Growth Strategy, which sets an ambition to upgrade all Social Housing to an energy performance rating of at least C. The Government has also set a target for all new homes to be "net zero" in relation to carbon emissions by 2030 and for all social homes to be carbon neutral by 2050.

We want to ensure that we provide the most sustainable and cost-efficient heating systems in our housing stock to support both the environment and support those on low incomes to reduce their fuel costs, this is especially important with the cost-of-living crisis.

### **What we have already achieved:**

- Successfully obtained Social Housing Decarbonisation Funding to reduce tenants' bills and improve energy efficiency of homes – this will be spent on improving the 50 worst performing homes in each district.
- Achieved average rating of EPC C on all of our homes
- Improved information shared with tenants about energy efficiency measures within their homes so that they can get the most benefit from them

### **What we will be focusing on next:**

- Developing a program of works to help ensure we meet our obligations to have all housing stock at EPC C by 2030
- Beginning a pilot program of retrofit works to a selection of properties
- Educating tenants in how to be energy efficient within their homes: to encourage and support with minimising energy bills and reducing the risk of damp and mould.
- Working with partners to increase the availability of electric vehicle charging points within our council owned neighbourhoods.
- Working with Public Realm to encourage greater levels of Biodiversity within our estates and neighbourhoods; by planting wildflowers, reducing grass cutting and using natural solutions.

### **What success will look like:**

**Our homes have improved EPC ratings, our tenants have reduced fuel bills and we have made progress towards our Net Zero ambitions.**

# Priority Three:

## Delivering new council housing

### Why this is a priority?:

We need to ensure that we are making sure that we are playing our part in delivering affordable and good quality homes so that people can build safe and settled lives.

As of July 2024, we had 1657 applications on our waiting list across Babergh and Mid Suffolk and in August 2024 we had 131 households currently living in temporary accommodation (Including Bed and Breakfast accommodation).

### What we have already achieved:

- **Babergh – 93 new affordable homes built or purchased between 2015 and 2023**
- **Mid Suffolk – 136 new affordable homes built or purchased between 2015 and 2023**

### What we will be focusing on next:

- Working with partners to provide new homes at affordable rent or for affordable home ownership, and where financially viable, social rent.
- Refreshing the New Build Design Guide in line with member aspirations around the environment and sustainability.
- Increasing the delivery of new homes in line with environmental and sustainability aspirations.

### What success will look like:

**There is an increase in affordable housing delivery and new homes are built in line with our environmental and sustainability aspirations and housing waiting lists reduce.**

# Priority Four:

## Improving the services that we provide to our tenants

### **Why this is a priority?:**

We need to ensure that we are compliant with the new Social Housing Regulation Consumer Standards. We need to Improve Tenant Satisfaction with our services. We know from current Tenant Satisfaction Measure scores and feedback that we need to do better and have improvement plans in place. Alongside this we are working on improving our complaints performance and ensuring that when things go wrong that we are responding fairly and promptly and in line with the housing ombudsman's code.

### **What we have already achieved:**

- Collected, monitored, and published Tenant Satisfaction data in line with the Regulator's requirements. This, along with our plans for improvement, are shared with tenants so that we can be open and transparent, and they can hold us to account.
- Implemented a new Complaints system to improve communication with our tenants and increase our performance with complaint handling in line with the Ombudsman code.
- Increased training requirements for staff around complaint handling and continual professional development.

### **What we will be focusing on next:**

- Benchmarking our performance and reporting on it.
- Learning from every Complaint and ensuring that everyone has their complaints dealt with promptly and fairly.
- Ensuring efficient use of the Council's housing stock by creating a cohesive plan to address overcrowding and meeting the needs of larger families.
- Creating a scheme to identify, incentivize, support and encourage tenants to downsize.
- Establish compliance with the Social Housing Regulations, including Consumer Standards and Building Safety Regulations
- Continually reviewing our income processes to ensure that we are maximizing our income, helping tenants to sustain their tenancies and preventing unnecessary evictions.
- Reviewing our Sheltered Housing offer to ensure our provision of independent housing for older people meets the needs and requirements of our residents and our organisation; alongside commissioning an Older People's Homes Development Strategy.

### **What success will look like:**

**Overall Tenant Satisfaction with our services improves and we are delivering positive outcomes to our tenants and communities in line with the requirements of the Consumer Standards.**



# Priority Five:

## Improving the neighbourhoods that we manage

### **Why this is a priority?:**

Everyone deserves a neighbourhood where they can feel proud and safe to live in. Tenants and Residents should be able to understand the level of service that they can expect to receive in relation to how their neighbourhoods and communal areas are managed and they need to understand how they can hold us to account.

### **What we have already achieved:**

- Carried out 14 Community Action Days since November 2022; where we have worked alongside communities and staff to improve their neighbourhoods and understand what they would like to see change in the future.
- Identified with tenants 21 projects for improvements to be made to our neighbourhoods.
- Introduced our Neighbourhood Expert involvement role, where tenants can identify issues with us as they arise, and we can respond more effectively.
- Launched a new inspection tool called PhotoBook which gives us more accessible data on the quality of our communal areas so we can target improvements where needed.

### **What we will be focusing on next:**

- Carrying out Greater Places projects across both districts, led by tenant data and consultation to make improvements to communal HRA land
- Reviewing each of our larger estates and actively engaging tenants and stakeholders in how we could develop solutions to improve the environment and create neighbourhoods that are attractive and desirable to all.
- Developing a new approach to housing management which is proactive, community focussed and is more responsive to the needs and vulnerabilities of our tenants.
- Developing a Service Level Agreement for the provision of grounds maintenance services to council estates.
- Increasing tenant satisfaction with where they live.
- Utilising available data to inform a plan for the future alternative uses for low demand or unsuitable garage sites.

### **What success will look like:**

**Tenant Satisfaction with 'contribution to the neighbourhood' improves, tenants feel proud of their neighbourhood and have increased wellbeing. Estate improvements are carried out and we, as their landlord, take a more proactive approach.**

# Priority Six:

## Involving tenants in the running of the service

### Why this is a priority?:

Increased involvement and opportunities for tenant engagement are at the heart of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. Our Tenant Engagement Strategy clearly sets out our vision that,

***“Housing services are delivered through multiple channels that convey clear, streamlined communication with our residents. Meaningful tenant engagement puts tenants at the heart of everything we do.”***

Effective tenant engagement has many benefits: it can highlight existing and new services that are valued by tenants, provides feedback on how services feel for the user, so the Council can act on this feedback and provide service improvements, it improves value for money and better communication and improves relationships with tenants.

### What we have already achieved:

- Published our Tenant Engagement Strategy in 2022 and its delivery plan and reviewed it annually.
- Developed an innovative Governance model composed of Council Members and tenant representatives, to scrutinise performance, contribute to strategy, operations and policy development.
- Increased tenant engagement and amplified the tenant voice throughout our service delivery.

### **What we will be focusing on next:**

- Ensuring that all new tenants are aware of their rights and responsibilities, including how they can get involved in the management of their homes and communities.
- Increase the data held about who our tenants are so we can ensure we are delivering equitable landlord services.
- Listening to tenants to ensure they have their voices heard; through regular meetings, scrutiny panels and being part of decision making.
- Increasing the pride tenant's feel living in our council owned homes and communities by carrying out our 'tenant respect and fairness campaign.'
- Gaining Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) accreditation.
- Creating a set of service standards, across the whole housing service, with colleagues and tenants to ensure tenants are aware of the level of service that they can expect and can hold us to account.
- Undertaking Tenant Board Scrutiny projects, to deep dive into areas where we are underperforming.
- Recruiting to and utilising the Tenant Complaint Experts role within the housing complaints process to give tenants a voice and allow them to scrutinise our complaint performance.

### **What success will look like:**

**Tenants continue to be at the centre of our decision making, feel that they are treated fairly & with respect and are aware of the various ways in which they can influence our landlord services.**

# Priority Seven:

## Implementing digital transformation

### Why this is a priority:

Ensuring that we have effective systems and processes in place enables us to provide a more efficient landlord service to our tenants and communities. It also enables us to create efficiencies for the benefit of our tenants and provides value for money. Technology will also help us to use data in a more intelligent way so that decisions that we make are evidence based.

### What we have already achieved:

- Introduced a Customer Relationship Management system, which has enabled our teams to collaborate more easily, broken down silo working and improved our communication.
- Developed our current systems and improved processes to increase the level of information we hold about our homes and tenants to ensure we can meet the needs of our tenants.

### What we will be focusing on next:

- Ensuring our housing management systems are fit for purpose and enable us to deliver a modern housing service that our tenants and staff expect.
- Ensuring that we are capturing and using performance data in our performance management system, Pentana, to enable us to make informed decisions and to continually improve.
- Providing confidence and assurance in our data reporting and data governance.

### What success will look like:

**We have systems that are fit for purpose, we have a comprehensive understanding of our future system needs and are making data driven decisions about the provision of services to our tenants.**

# Priority Eight:

## Ensuring sustainable financial management of our council Housing Services

### Why this is a priority:

We must ensure that we are providing tenants with value for money for the rent and service charges they pay and so that we can continue to deliver quality services that our tenants deserve and expect.

### What we have already achieved:

- Developed new 30-year business plans using a consultant who has expertise across the sector
- Commissioned a stock condition survey to ensure our component replacement costs over the next 30 years are accurate
- Identified our financial challenges over the next 5 year and put a plan in place to mitigate these

### What we will be focusing on next:

- Annually reviewing the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plans to reflect our current position and our mid-term financial position.
- Working through the actions in our plans to alleviate financial stress on the HRA.
- Improving the financial data we provide to cabinet and members, so they are aware of the status of the HRA account.

### What success will look like:

**We have financially stable business plans which have been 'stress tested' and we have the ability, within our financial constraints, to provide services which meet the needs of our tenants.**



## Monitoring and Governance

This housing strategy sets out the current housing priorities and how we will address them over the short term and sets the direction of future travel beyond.

The strategy is supported by a comprehensive and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) Delivery Plan. Our Master Housing Services Action Plan combines actions from this Joint Homes and Housing Strategy, the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and The Tenant Engagement Strategy.

The Joint Homes and Housing Strategy will be reviewed annually by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Delivery Plan will be monitored quarterly and updates will be provided to the Housing Programme Board.

Going forward, we will ensure that the way we work will be flexible enough to incorporate changes and take advantage of potential new funding opportunities as Central Government's policies around us change – in order to maximise benefits to our residents.







Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils

# HOMES AND HOUSING STRATEGY

2024

