

# Breckland Housing Strategy

September 2024



Breckland  
COUNCIL

# Foreword

by Councillor Sarah Suggitt  
Deputy Leader and Executive Member  
for Housing and Planning

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Breckland is an ambitious council that cares, listens, and supports people and businesses within our district. We are proud of our district and we are working hard to make it a place where people and businesses can thrive. However, we cannot achieve this on our own.

Breckland is a great place to live, work and visit but is not without its challenges. The requirement for more, new, quality homes that are affordable and meet the needs of our local communities, while simultaneously improving the quality of existing stock, is crucial.

Some of the challenges are widespread, long-standing, and complex. In order to address these it is important to understand them more fully and adopt a wider view of housing matters, including early intervention in relation to homelessness issues. However, with challenge comes opportunity and this Housing Strategy constitutes a key part of a holistic and systemic attempt to respond to the acute housing need through capitalising upon opportunity, collectively. It is not about 'reinventing the wheel' or duplicating existing initiatives but, to stand any chance of success, it is vital that we link relevant workstreams and build upon the success of these in doing so through effective and meaningful, collaboration.

This Housing Strategy sets out our vision for how we, collectively with stakeholders, might start to make a difference in addressing the housing challenges we face and identifies four clear priorities for doing so. It includes a 'delivery plan', identifying the highlighted actions as being necessary and sets a timescale for achieving these. These priorities and actions are informed by our evidence base and stakeholder engagement. The identified actions vary in complexity and delivery lead times. While many of the actions are achievable within existing resources and within a reasonably short timeframe, some of the more ambitious actions will need to be progressed on a stand-alone basis and may have resource implications which will need to be worked through at the appropriate time. The majority can only be achieved through proactive and effective collaboration, and we are fully committed to this.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Suggitt".

**Councillor Sarah Suggitt**  
Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing and Planning



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# Executive Summary

Breckland is a vibrant rural district with immense potential to thrive. Residents current housing needs are substantial, and a **bold, ambitious** Housing Strategy is required to increase the supply of new quality homes.



This Housing Strategy is evidence-based and has been informed by recent research, including the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) 2024.

We have worked closely with key stakeholders who have had essential input into the evolution of this document; workshops were invaluable, generating a plethora of ideas and insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by the housing sector.

This strategy seeks to:

- Take an ambitious approach to accelerate the delivery of affordable housing;
- Build on existing stakeholder relationships and lead on creating new connections to facilitate successful delivery and improvement of homes;
- Ensure quality housing as set out by new Breckland Design Guide, the adopted and emerging Local Plan, and national planning framework;
- Support the preventative actions which are already in place to relieve homelessness;
- Bring forward much needed homes to address the significant affordable housing and temporary accommodation need in the district; and
- Commit to a wider way of working and openness to flexibility and collaboration - within and without the Council.

These will be guided by a set of priorities and an accompanying delivery plan which sets out clear actions and methods for achieving the objectives of the strategy.

## How do we create an exciting conversation around delivering housing?

We know that new development can be complex and can sometimes cause concern for our communities. This strategy demonstrates the commitment to the delivery of high-quality homes which meet housing needs and makes a positive contribution to our built environment.

We will continue to collaborate with partners across the sector, in pursuit of innovative solutions, to achieve housing choices which strengthen our communities and support our most vulnerable residents.



# 1. Introduction

As an organisation, Breckland Council cares, listens, and supports people and businesses within our district. Our ambition is to prevent homelessness in the district; make sure that our residents have suitable, safe, and secure homes; play our part in tackling health inequalities; and work with partners to help increase the supply of housing, particularly in areas of priority need.

We are aware of the phenomenal housing need and wish to act proactively, going above and beyond our statutory duty to respond to the challenge(s) faced. We are also acutely aware of the positive impact that access to safe and secure housing has on our residents health and wellbeing. The Housing Strategy, therefore, aligns with, and complements, other ongoing programmes of activity such as the Housing Allocations Policy and the work of the Housing Solutions Team, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, the Inspiring Communities Programme, emerging Local Plan and emerging Asset Strategy.

Breckland is already taking a holistic and systemic approach to tackling the housing crisis, therefore none of our policies and strategies, including this Housing Strategy, should be considered in isolation. Instead, they all form part of a comprehensive approach to preventing and addressing homelessness through effective collaboration.

This Housing Strategy identifies the key priorities for addressing housing and homelessness throughout the Breckland district, with an emphasis on raising the quality of new and existing homes as well as increasing the supply of new, suitable housing. It identifies a series of important tactical interventions to achieve maximum impact through effective partnership working.

## Our Priorities:

**Priority 1:** Increase the supply and diversity of affordable housing to ensure the right types of housing are available in the right places

**Priority 2:** Improve the quality and sustainability of homes in the private rented sector, building thriving and healthy communities across Breckland

**Priority 3:** Make better use of existing homes across the district

**Priority 4:** Support vulnerable residents to access suitable homes and have housing choices

**These priorities will be underpinned by the Delivery Plan set out in Appendix 1.**

We have big ideas and will challenge ourselves to come up with innovative approaches to meeting the needs of the local communities that we serve. Through our actions, we want to make things better, but we know that we can't do it alone. We will therefore continue to work with existing stakeholders and seek new partnerships to achieve even greater impact.

We are committed to the delivery of housing and achieving our housing priorities, including addressing and preventing homelessness as well as health inequality. This relies upon accelerated delivery of high-quality, new homes in addition to making the most of



our existing stock through improvement, adaption and bringing empty properties back into use. We will continually seek to improve the quality and supply of new housing being built, to provide greater choice of the types, location, and prices of new homes to meet residents' aspirations and needs. This includes ensuring that there is appropriate housing to meet the needs of older people, young people, vulnerable people and those who are disadvantaged. This supports the health and wellbeing of residents, families and communities, both in our towns and in our rural areas because a decent home can improve quality of life.

We know that good housing plays a critical role in the health and wellbeing of our communities. Our residents need access to suitable and safe housing that is affordable to establish a settled home and achieve their ambitions for family life, career development, a fulfilling retirement, and opportunities to thrive. In financial terms, a well-housed population helps to reduce and delay demand for NHS services. It is estimated that the cost of poor housing to the NHS is £1.4 billion per year (Kings Fund, 2018).

When considering housing it is important to bear in mind that there are different types and tenure of housing available. Our role is to ensure that there is as wide a choice as possible so that people have options as to the housing best suited to their circumstances. The right housing options are also vital to realising our ambitions for inclusive economic growth. Providing appropriate housing for all our residents can only be achieved by using several delivery routes, whether that be at a local level through our own plans and policies, with partners or through our use of legislation.

## **PURPOSE / WHO IS THE STRATEGY FOR?**

This document identifies the nature, scale and extent of the housing challenges that exist throughout the Breckland district and sets out a coherent, comprehensive approach for capitalising upon opportunities to address these as far as possible. Ultimately, successful achievement of the priorities and actions identified within this document relies firmly upon effective collaboration between a variety of stakeholders. Inevitably, the main focus is dedicated to preventing and relieving homelessness in varying forms.

It is important that this strategy is evidence led. We have, therefore, collated and analysed evidence from a variety of sources to inform our strategic and political choices.

The strategy will benefit, and is intended for:

**Residents and Communities:** We will continue to facilitate opportunities for a mix of new homes which local people can afford and, additionally, support people with identified specific needs.

**The Council:** To ensure housing makes a significant contribution in the ambitions and delivery of the Local Plan. To address housing need and protect and enhance 'quality of place', whilst continually adjusting to becoming a more financially self-sufficient district council.

**Our Partners:** Breckland Council is determined to demonstrate the 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 this.



## 2. Context

We are delivering our services within a context of major cuts to public spending, including housing investment, welfare and housing reform, which present significant challenges to delivering local priorities.

Since 2010, local government funding has changed significantly:

- The amount of money available to spend from government grants, council tax and business rates fell by 17.5% between 2009/10 and 2019/20, before partially recovering. However, in 2021/22 it was still 10.2% below 2009/10 levels. (Institute for Government)
- Grants were cut by 40% in real terms between 2009/10 and 2019/20, from £46.5bn to £28.0bn (2023/24 prices). (Institute for Government)
- Local authorities lost income and spent more because of higher costs and increased demand for services during the Covid -19 pandemic. (Institute for Government)

Furthermore, there have been substantial changes to national policy affecting housing and related areas including:

- Welfare reforms that have reduced the income available for rents
- Increased focus in housing policy on home ownership rather than renting
- Reduced funding for the development of affordable housing

We are, therefore, delivering our services within a national context of major cuts to public spending, including housing investment, welfare and housing reform, which present significant challenges to delivering local priorities.

Much of the way in which housing services are delivered is governed by legislation and policies. Most notably, at a local level, the Housing Strategy links to the adopted and emerging Local Plans. This required a need to ensure that the Housing Strategy was developed with a consistent evidence base and understanding of place; whilst ensuring that both the Local Plan and Strategy are constant in their planned priorities and outcomes.

### LOCAL CONTEXT

Breckland is one of the largest and fastest growing rural districts in England. Nestled on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, the district spans over 500 square miles of beautiful countryside and has a population of c.140,000.

Breckland is centred around the five market towns of Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffham, Thetford and Watton. Half of the current residents live in one of the market towns with the remainder living in rural village homes. This means that the district has a low population density. The area's rural nature is characterised by its 112 parishes, numerous villages and low crime rate, which, arguably, make Breckland one of the most attractive and safe places to live in the UK.



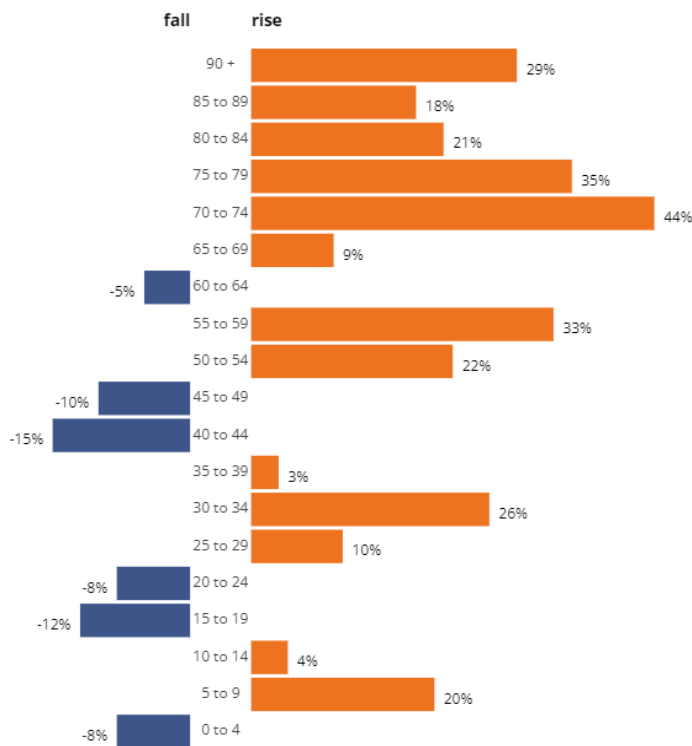


Figure 1: Population change (%) by age group in Breckland, 2011 to 2021 (Office of National Statistics)

Residents are living longer and, as a result, Breckland’s population is growing older. The 2021 Census indicates that there has been an increase of 25.8% in people aged 65 years and over in Breckland since 2011. It also advises that there has been an increase of 3.6% in people aged 15 to 64 years and an increase of 4.4% in children aged under 15 years.

As a predominantly rural area, the district has a traditional housing stock consisting, primarily, of low-rise brick-built homes. Whilst house prices in many areas are comparatively low nationally, affordability remains a significant challenge locally due to income levels. Breckland, therefore, needs to ensure the right mix of types and tenures of housing are available to meet the different needs of the growing and aging population.

Education attainment levels across Breckland do not compare favourably with other parts of the country. This is particularly stark when it comes to higher education participation. Today, just 27% of Breckland residents are educated to degree level, compared to 40% nationally. This could impact on future employment prospects and social mobility across the district.

The average salary across the Breckland district is £30,035 (Office of National Statistics (ONS)). This is 16.5% lower than England’s national average salary of £34,963. The 2021 Census also indicates that Breckland has increasing numbers of children living in low-income families.





### 3. Developing the Strategy / Evidence Base

This Housing Strategy is informed by various documents. These include:

- Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA), 2024
- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), 2024
- Demand analysis of the Housing service, 2024
- Adopted Local Plan, 2019, and emerging Local Plan

#### CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Analysis of the evidence base indicated the existence of four clear priorities which formed the basis of engagement with stakeholders:

- Increase the supply and diversity of affordable housing to ensure the right types of housing are available in the right places
- Improve the quality and sustainability of homes, building thriving and healthy communities across Breckland
- Make better use of existing homes across the district
- Support vulnerable residents to access suitable homes and have housing choices



In January - February 2024 we held workshops with over 50 stakeholders including district councillors, officers from Registered Providers, Board members from community-led housing groups, members of the VCSE / Charity sector, private developers and builders.

One-to-one engagements with stakeholders from a range of organisations also occurred during the same period to better understand the specific opportunities and challenges from an individual organisational perspective.



## 4. Housing challenges facing Breckland

There are several challenges and opportunities relevant to housing provision within Breckland. These include but are not limited to:

### **SUPPLY OF NEW HOUSING, PARTICULARLY AFFORDABLE**

The requirement to meet the need for additional houses in the district is set out in current housing targets and informed by work on the Local Plan. Although we are meeting the overall objectively assessed need (OAN) target throughout the district and currently have a 'five-year housing land supply', there remains an under-delivery of new homes that are 'affordable'.

Most housing demand is in the main market towns, but there remains an acute, demand for affordable housing in some smaller rural settlements. Homes in rural areas can provide critical support to the sustainability of those places, by enabling younger working families to remain and older residents to move to more suitable housing, while continuing to live within their community.

The ongoing cost of living crisis in the UK is resulting in a larger than usual proportion of people being unable to afford their living costs. This has exacerbated the housing crisis and is resulting in unprecedented need for affordable homes. As demand continues to outweigh supply across the district, Breckland's housing solutions team is facing the increasing challenge of the ability to discharge its homelessness prevention and relief duties, whilst helping those most in housing need.

### **HOUSING STOCK CONDITION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

Excess cold is the most common 'hazard' identified in the private housing stock across Breckland by the council's private sector housing team. Based on averages for the English Housing Stock Condition Survey, East of England, rural districts 2018/19 Breckland is likely to have up to 16,000 privately rented dwellings. Of these, it is expected that up to 20% will have a Category 1 Hazard, which is a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety.

Regional estimates suggest that there are a large proportion of occupied homes and houses of multiple occupation (HMO's) that are deemed non-decent across Breckland according to the Decent Homes Standard. We have a legal duty to inspect any dwelling if we believe there may be a hazard and to take enforcement action when a category 1 hazard is identified.

All HMOs with five or more occupants need to be licensed and it is a criminal offence not to do so. There are currently 68 licensed HMOs within the Breckland district. These were inspected at the point of licensing and were compliant with conditions. All HMOs need to be operated in accordance with relevant management regulations and criminal proceedings will take place if these are not adhered to.



## MAKING BETTER USE OF EXISTING HOMES

Vacant, second homes and holiday lets account for 4.4% of Breckland’s housing stock (HEDNA) but our focus is on vacant (empty) homes that are not being used by anyone at all. Whilst the level of vacant homes is relatively low across the district, in comparison to other local authorities in Norfolk, these are still a wasted resource. Many empty homes tend to resolve themselves in 3 -6 months, however those that remain empty for a longer duration could be made better use of.

Some affordable housing is lost each year through sales and there is a mismatch between the need for, and supply of, affordable homes.

## DEMAND FOR AFFORDABLE SOCIAL RENTED

The following table illustrates that demand for social homes in Breckland is continuing to outweigh demand:

Applicants Priority Band	Bedroom Need				
	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 + bed	Total
<b>Band</b>					
<b>Bronze</b>	166	125	51	10	352
<b>Silver</b>	293	171	123	34	621
<b>Gold</b>	302	177	74	45	598
<b>Emergency</b>	58	31	22	13	124
<b>Total</b>	819	504	270	102	1695
<b>Number of homes available for let</b>	170 (81 of these for older people only)	260	107	14	551

Figure 2: Social housing supply vs demand – December 2023 (Breckland Council)

Registered providers are building significant numbers of shared ownership homes in the district, however, very few applicants on the housing register have expressed an interest in this tenure. Whilst, for many households, this could be an affordable solution, a typical 25% share of a £240,000 two-bedroom home is priced at £60,000. With average earnings across Breckland at £30,000 per annum, this is resulting in many potential shared ownership applicants being priced out of the market.



## **SUPPORTING VULNERABLE RESIDENTS**

The Housing Team is currently experiencing high demand and an increase in complex needs presentations. Alongside an enhanced provision of quality accommodation within the district, we are striving to reduce the overall demand for housing intervention. This is linked to our continued work under the Inspiring Communities and Thriving Places banners.

Breckland's population is also growing older. The recent HEDNA indicates that the district's population of over 65-year-olds is likely to increase by 18,400 (52%) to 2046. There is already a shortage of suitable homes in the district for older people who need additional support to live independently and, due to the aging population, it is anticipated that demand will only increase. There is also a shortage of homes for households with disabilities who need accessible properties.

Many of those households with additional support needs face complex issues such as a history of mental health, abuse or drug and alcohol dependency, physical health or disability challenges or are potentially vulnerable due to their age, support needs or a learning disability.

## **SPECIALIST HOUSING REQUIREMENT**

There is a requirement across the district to ensure adequate provision for rough sleepers, Gypsies and Travellers, travelling show people, and those desiring custom and self-build accommodation.

Breckland has a Homelessness and Rough Sleeper strategy which aligns with this Housing Strategy and is developing a new one for 2025. The Council is also reviewing the arrangements surrounding administration of its Custom and Self Build register in light of the recent legislative changes and to better understand need.

A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) has been conducted as part of the evidence base supporting the emerging Local Plan. The findings from this will inform our approach to the provision of sites, plots and pitches for our Gypsy and Traveller community.

We are also committed to increasing the provision of supported and independent living accommodation across the district. We are aware that these types of homes are required to support our ageing population as well as vulnerable persons experiencing substance dependency, domestic abuse, mental health problems and homelessness.

The results of the above work will lead the way in ensuring that Breckland is proactive in providing suitable and place-based accommodation.



## NUTRIENT NEUTRALITY

In March 2022 from Natural England advised that new development within, or draining into, the catchment of protected habitats, which comprised of overnight accommodation, or any development not involving overnight accommodation, but which may have non-sewerage water quality implications, has the potential to cause adverse impacts to nutrient pollution. Such development includes, but is not limited to:

- New homes
- Student accommodation
- Care homes

This has delayed several developments within the catchment(s). However, a large area of the Breckland District lies outside the catchment(s) and delivery continues in these locations.

Breckland is working closely with its neighbouring authorities, as well as with Natural England and Anglian Water, to provide a platform which will enable developers to buy credits to mitigate the impact of nutrients. Any mitigation that releases credits will need to be localised in relation to the development, in place before any dwellings are occupied, and be in place for at least 80 years. The trading of credits via the Norfolk Environmental Credit's program to assist the delivery of development in the Yare Catchment is due to begin with small and medium sized developers shortly and Norfolk Environmental Credits, in partnership with Breckland, are looking at other potential schemes for credits in the Wensum Catchment. Finally, developments can advance their own mitigation solutions and we have started to see a number of these progress.

Further details of the above can be found by visiting the [Council's website](#) and the [Norfolk Environmental Credit's website](#).



## 5. Our Priorities

In this Housing Strategy we have grouped our actions and interventions into priorities:

PRIORITY 1	Increase the supply and diversity of affordable housing to ensure the right types of housing are available in the right places
PRIORITY 2	Improve the quality and sustainability of homes, building thriving and healthy communities across Breckland
PRIORITY 3	Make better use of existing homes across the district
PRIORITY 4	Support vulnerable residents to access suitable homes and have housing choice



## Priority 1: Increase the supply and diversity of affordable housing to ensure the right types of housing are available in the right places

### OUR AMBITIONS

To accelerate the building of new affordable, low carbon homes across the district, providing new homes for our residents and making improvements to existing communities that benefit everyone in the locality.

To seek opportunities to acquire new, quality homes, including a successful programme of properties for use as accommodation for homeless households. To work closely with public sector partners to provide key services to support these new homes.

To work with partners and stakeholders to ensure local people can access homes through our allocations policy. To use existing housing stock across the district efficiently by working with Registered Providers to help residents move to more suitable properties.

### WHY THIS MATTERS

We know that a secure, safe and quality place to call home plays a huge part in both wellbeing and long-term life chances.

There are extreme pressure on affordable housing as demand continues to outweigh supply. This issue is exacerbated by the unaffordability of the private housing market, leading to a considerable number of households living in unsuitable or temporary accommodation.

As demand for social housing is high, and increasing, it is important for us to make the best use of the homes within the district, whilst ensuring adequate affordable housing provision on new developments.

### OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

Building new affordable homes and supporting under occupying residents to move to more suitable properties helps free up and increase the numbers of family sized homes to help alleviate the 191 households, we know are in overcrowded housing and are on the Housing Register.

The cost of land and pressures relating to Nutrient Neutrality are significant challenges. We will work with partners and stakeholders to develop an effective scheme of mitigation credits to unlock developments at a cost which does not have an adverse effect on scheme viability.

### ACHIEVING OUR AIMS

We work with our partners to ensure new homes are built to a high standard, with an emphasis on design, including homes for residents with specific housing needs.

Our Allocations Policy prioritises applicants with the greatest housing needs and a connection to Breckland.



## Priority 2: Improve the quality and sustainability of homes, building thriving and healthy communities across Breckland

### OUR AMBITIONS

To see a private rented sector that operates high standards of management and provides safe, good quality, affordable accommodation to meet current and future housing needs.

To have a private rented sector that people choose to live in, rather than a sector that people become forced to live in.

### WHY THIS MATTERS

The private rented sector makes up a third of Breckland's housing and, therefore, must contribute to the availability of high quality, safe, warm and well-maintained homes. Demand for housing across the district is at an all-time high. Many landlords are good but poor property conditions and poor services from a minority of landlords, coupled with unfair renting practices, continue to be a significant problem to private renters in Breckland.

The health and wellbeing of people, particularly vulnerable people, can be improved through ensuring housing is in good condition and safe.

### OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

We work with private and social landlords to ensure that the buildings meet safety requirements but use our enforcement powers where necessary. We can take action against landlords where there are issues around the condition or safety of a property.

We will tackle rogue landlords using our powers and publicising successful enforcement action to communicate to landlords and reassure tenants that poor standards and unacceptable behaviour will be addressed.

### ACHIEVING OUR AIMS

We will continue to promote high standards of professionalism amongst landlords and managing agents. We will monitor standards and act against rogue landlords and letting agents and any poorly performing housing associations using available enforcement tools and legislation.

Where appropriate, we will work with other agencies to address criminal behaviour by landlords and publicise successful enforcement action.





## Priority 3: Make better use of existing homes across the district

### OUR AMBITIONS

To make the best use of existing homes, including those that are empty or in poor condition.

To ensure that people can move home, if needed, or have adaptations made to a home that no longer meets their needs.

### WHY THIS MATTERS

Assisting residents to have much needed adaptations to their existing homes can help them to remain independent and in suitable accommodation for longer, reducing risks to their health and reducing social care and hospital costs.

If properties stay empty for longer than 6 months, they have the potential to cause problems to residents and communities attracting anti-social behaviour, devaluing neighbouring properties, preventing reinvestment and regeneration or being unsightly. They are, also, not being used as homes, which are much needed.

### OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

There are currently not enough funds in Breckland's Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) budget to carry out all required adaptations to existing homes. We will continue to seek further grant funding opportunities to assist us in delivering these required adaptations in a timely manner.

We are keen to secure a better match between the size of social tenant households and the size of the homes they occupy. We cannot rely on our allocations scheme alone to achieve this. We will therefore develop a range of initiatives to support tenants who are either under occupying or overcrowded.

We recognise that residential properties may become empty for several reasons. We will, therefore, work with property owners to help them return their properties to occupied use as soon as possible. This, in turn, will help to support those on our Housing Register as housing demand continues to outweigh supply.

### ACHIEVING OUR AIMS

We will prioritise meeting, maintaining, and exceeding the decent homes standard in social properties, encouraging and incentivising investment in privately rented accommodation and enforcing when standards are unacceptable.



## Priority 4: Support vulnerable residents to access suitable homes and have housing choice

### OUR AMBITIONS

To build strong, meaningful, and person-centred relationships with our residents, enabling staff to intervene early, appropriately and effectively and to provide specialist interventions for those with multiple and complex needs.

To work with colleagues across specialisms and alongside our voluntary community partners to create sustainable, resilient, and safe communities, where people can access suitable choice-based housing, have a sense of belonging and feel that they want to participate in their local community.

### WHY THIS MATTERS

We have an important role in shaping healthy places for Breckland's residents. Through our corporate plan we are committed to inspiring our communities and creating thriving places.

As a Local Authority, we have an opportunity to act to provide intervention, in collaboration with our partners, to support the districts residents in the life challenges they face, including access to suitable housing.

### OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

National policy over the last decade has inflicted significant cuts to our budgets and we have to prioritise how we use our limited resources in the most effective and efficient way.

We are working in partnership across the council, NHS and voluntary sector services in local neighbourhoods to address more complex issues experienced by Breckland residents including homelessness.

We are seeking to attain the best-practice Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation across our services. In support of this, we are working to seek more 'safe' accommodation within the district for those residents fleeing domestic abuse.

### ACHIEVING OUR AIMS

Our Housing and Community Enabling teams are working hard to meet the varying needs of Breckland's residents by offering a higher level of support for those in crisis or with more complex issues to resolve.



## 6. Conclusion

Breckland's residents' housing needs are substantial. To meet the requirements across the district it is essential that we continue to actively engage and work with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to: help increase the supply of new quality homes to meet local needs; to improve the condition of existing housing to provide warm, safe, secure and affordable homes; to make the best use of scarce, existing affordable homes; and, critically, as the strategy is not just about 'bricks and mortar', help meet the needs of all our households to ensure they can access and sustain a home for life.

This housing strategy sets out the current housing challenges and the priorities for Breckland to overcome these. It looks ahead to how we will address our priorities 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 (Appendix 1) which sets out the actions we will undertake to deliver against our ambitions.

The success of our strategy depends on delivering these actions. We will, therefore, continually track and amend this action plan if we need to respond to the council's priorities related to housing and our residents' housing needs. The Council, along with other delivery partners, will require innovative solutions as part of a collective response.

### **DELIVERY OF THE STRATEGY / RESOURCES**

Successful achievement of the actions identified within the Delivery Plan rely upon effective partnership working. Clearly there will be a need for the Council to perform a lead role in many areas and it is important that this aligns with other priorities, activities and resources.

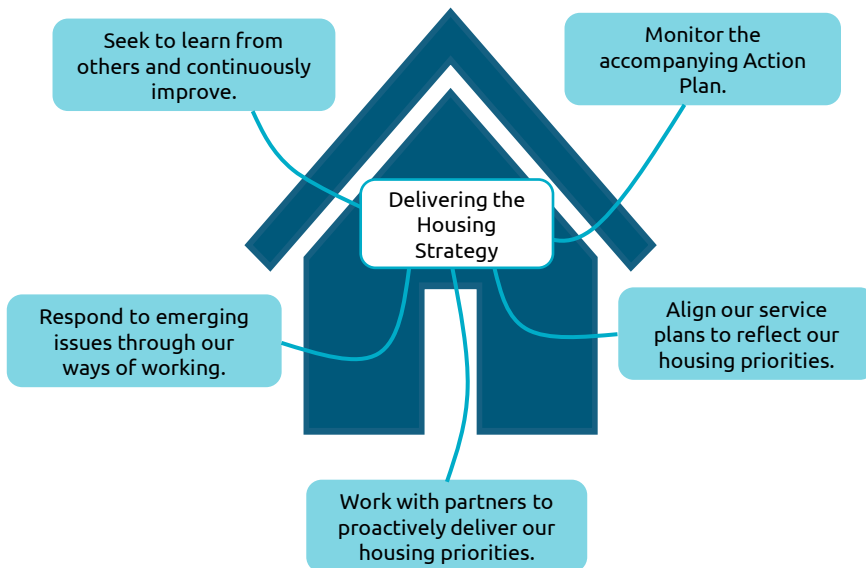
Council staffing is fundamental in relation to our capacity to deliver on our challenging development targets, as well as expanding upon the capabilities within our workforce. As a Local Authority, Breckland has funding challenges and limited resources, therefore, we will be unable to deliver all our ambitions alone and at once. It is important we commit to investigating and further understanding how we can achieve these aims via alternative ways of working.

Furthermore, we recognise that we need to make a long-term commitment to development to ensure our objective of building more homes is achieved. It is likely that some actions may require additional resources to deliver our aims. In this event, the appropriate governance and approval processes will be adhered to.

Housing services in Breckland are delivered by the Council in collaboration with a wide range of partners and stakeholders including Registered Providers, builders, developers, landowners, parish councils and councillors. Stakeholder financing comes from many avenues. Previous funding has been provided by Homes England to deliver the large number of new affordable housing units; this has also levered in significant amounts of private sector finance.



We have other resources available for affordable housing provision such as planning obligations and capital receipts arising from Right to Buy (RTB) and shared ownership sales, although the latter are relatively small. Other resources for affordable housing may be used to support house building or affordable housing provided through a Registered Provider, such as accessing grants from Homes England or receiving S106 funding.



## MONITORING

The strategy seeks to offer a resilient and long-term approach to delivering good quality housing in the district. It provides positive, proactive and helpful actions to achieve this as outlined in Appendix 1, Delivery Plan.

We will review the strategy and implementation of the delivery plan on a regular basis, responding to changing needs and arising issues.



**APPENDIX 1 - DELIVERY PLAN**

**Strategic Priority 1** Increase the supply and diversity of affordable housing to ensure the right types of housing are available in the right places.

Aim	Reference	Category	Action required	Resources		Target
				Existing	Additional	
Accelerate the delivery of new affordable, low carbon homes across the district, providing new homes for our residents and making improvements to existing communities that benefit everyone in the locality	1.1.1	PR	Complete the refresh of the Local plan, providing clear policies and direction to all involved with development, enabling housing needs to be met. This will be supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP).	X		Apr-25
	1.1.2	SH	Devise and implement a revised approach to Custom and Self Build (CSB). Clearly set out requirements via a new policy and assisting those eligible to seek appropriate land to build on via an appropriate register.	X		Oct-24
	1.1.3	PR	Facilitate the delivery of affordable Housing (AH) in locations where delivery would otherwise be restricted.	X		Mar-26
	1.1.3	PR	Encourage and support the use of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) by advocating climate responsive designs through Breckland's newly adopted Design Guide.	X		Mar-26
	1.1.4	PR	Enable 'developer surgeries' to support developers to engage with relevant bodies such as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE) etc.		X	Mar-25
	1.1.5	PR	Consider enhanced flexibility/innovation in respect of planning policy relating to smaller development sites in the rural area, for example, although not necessarily all/solely limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocating growth throughout the district through the emerging Local Plan</li> <li>Incentivise developers via additional flexibility surrounding Affordable Housing (AH) requirements</li> <li>Build in a requirement that Affordable Housing contributions are commuted in these developments</li> <li>Advocate our suite of supporting policies to encourage exception sites, community-led, starter homes, custom self build and specialist housing.</li> </ul>	X		Dec-25
	1.1.6	PR	Work with partners to devise a proactive approach to Nutrient Neutrality (NN) mitigation.	X		Ongoing
Seek opportunities to acquire new, quality homes, including a successful programme of properties for use as accommodation for homeless households. Work closely with public sector partners to provide key services to support these new homes.	1.2.1	SA	Support the approach to land acquisition identified within the asset strategy by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactively facilitating the delivery of 100% affordable housing schemes in locations previously deemed outside of any development boundary</li> <li>Aligning with/being informed by the approach set out in the asset strategy.</li> </ul>		X	Dec-26
	1.2.2	SA	Exploration/identification of a long-term stockholding strategy with the objective of bottoming out what sort of Registered Provider Breckland wishes to be and what objectives we wish to pursue as a result of our RP status. This action must align with/be informed by the approach set out in the asset strategy.		X	Ongoing
	1.2.3	PR	Maximise opportunities for Brownfield Land development and create a delivery pipeline by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactively engaging with landowners and developers to identify suitable redevelopment opportunities</li> <li>Creatively use the Norfolk Brownfield Housing fund (available by virtue of the Norfolk devolution deal) to maximise opportunities for re-use of previously developed land</li> <li>Positively consider allocations that trigger affordable housing contributions</li> <li>Prioritise allocation of Brownfield sites through the Local Plan</li> </ul>	X		Ongoing
	1.2.4	PR	Identify opportunities for funding and to work more effectively and collaboratively with public-sector partners - i.e. the One Public Estate (OPE) - to enable housing delivery –through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of a team approach, particularly on larger sites, bringing together district, statutory partners and developers with a collective effort to progress schemes</li> <li>Formulation of a sustainable development panel or forum where developers can share and test proposals</li> </ul>	X		Ongoing

Work with partners and stakeholders to ensure local people can access homes through our local lettings policy	1.3.1	SA	Acquire existing market dwellings for use as Affordable Homes to increase Breckland District Council's stock holding and leverage the benefit of our Registered Provider status by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximising the opportunity surrounding access to grant funding e.g. through Homes England's 'Affordable Homes Programme'</li> <li>• Repurposing s106 contributions</li> <li>• Considering borrowing to facilitate temporary accommodation, social rents and shared ownership homes</li> <li>• Bringing empty homes back into use via a supported retrofit programme</li> <li>• Seeking to address issues of affordability through maximising opportunities to incorporate Social Rented tenure</li> </ul>		X	Dec-26
	1.3.2	SH	Work closely with partners to ensure that affordable housing mix includes 1 and 4 bed homes, which are in high demand. These homes should be provided in areas where there is a specific need, we will therefore start to more explicitly direct developers to the types and tenure of property we want to see across the District.	X		Ongoing
	1.3.3	PR	Enable shared ownership tenure to be changed to affordable rented accommodation where it is currently restricted (i.e. via a s106 agreement) by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowing flexibility for affordable homes in accordance with market demands</li> <li>• Ensuring the shared ownership policy signifies the flexibility to change s106 agreements to enable this change if required</li> </ul>	X		Mar-25
Use existing housing stock across the district efficiently by working with Landlords to help residents move to more suitable properties	1.4.1	SH	Utilise the Rural exception site planning policy more expansively/effectively/innovatively by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working closely with the Rural Housing Enabler, employed by Community Action Norfolk (CAN), to proactively develop rural exception sites</li> <li>• Continue to foster our relationship with CAN to proactively seek settlements that could benefit from an exception site(s)</li> <li>• Work with the Rural Housing enabler to influence focus of attentions onto areas where there are high demands</li> <li>• Be more flexible with the wording of our planning policy</li> <li>• Support Community Led housing schemes through the Rural Enabler post</li> <li>• Be more flexible regarding local need vs general need affordable housing</li> <li>• Be more flexible regarding number of units delivered</li> </ul>	X		Ongoing during the employment term of the newly appointed Rural Housing Enabler
	1.4.2	SH	Work collaboratively across the sector to complete an audit of who lives in the social housing stock and assist residents to move to more suitable accommodation (downsize / move to larger premises) as appropriate.	X		Dec-25
	1.4.3	SH	Work collaboratively/innovatively across the sector to incentivise those people under occupying homes to downsize, thereby freeing up much needed family-sized homes for those in the greatest need.	X		Dec-24
	1.4.4	SH	Work collaboratively/innovatively with Landlords to ensure any long-term voids / properties awaiting disposal are used for short-term temporary accommodation.	X		Ongoing
	1.4.5	PR/SH	Review our model standard for s106 obligations on an annual basis to ensure it is reflective of need and fit for purpose.	X		Ongoing
	1.4.6	SH	Repurpose s106 sums to enable further development for affordable homes.	X		Ongoing

KEY	
	Confident can achieve
	Collaborative commitments
PR	Planning Related
SH	Strategic Housing
SA	Stand Alone

**Strategic Priority 2** Improve the quality and sustainability of homes, building thriving and healthy communities across Breckland

Aim	Reference	Category	Action required	Resources		Target
				Existing	Additional	
A private sector that operates high standards of management and provides, safe, good quality affordable accommodation to meet current and future housing needs	2.1.1	SH	Keep the condition of homes across our district under constant review, with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken by Breckland Council to ensure safe and healthy homes across our District (see also Aim 3 below).	x		Ongoing
	2.1.2	SH	Educate residents on how to keep homes warm and reduce risk of damp and mould through collaborative and ongoing communication campaigns.	X	X	Dec-24
	2.1.3	SH	Maximise opportunities to access grant funding to assist with improving energy performance of existing homes through retrofit e.g. Norfolk Warm Homes, HUG3 and ECO4 etc. Actively promote these schemes to increase the uptake across our district.	X		Ongoing
	2.1.4	SH	Explore how to access funds to improve the condition of our own stock using our Registered Provider status.	X		Ongoing
A private housing sector that people choose to live in rather than a sector that people become forced to live in	2.2.1	SH	Devise and publish an updated 'Park Homes Policy' giving clear information and advice on requirements and associated fees.	X		Dec-24
	2.2.2	SH	Promote the use of shared accommodation schemes by those under occupying their existing homes e.g. renting a spare room.	X		Ongoing
	2.2.3	SH	In collaboration with Landlords, encourage and incentivise residents that are under occupying their homes to downsize, freeing up much needed family accommodation.	X		Ongoing

KEY	
[Light Green Box]	Confident can achieve
[Dark Green Box]	Collaborative commitments
PR	Planning Related
SH	Strategic Housing
SA	Stand Alone

**Strategic Priority 3** Make better use of existing homes across the district

Aim	Reference	Category	Action required	Resources		Target
				Existing	Additional	
Make the best use of existing homes, including those that are empty or in poor condition.	3.1.1	SH	Keep the condition of homes across our district under constant review, with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken by Breckland Council to ensure safe and healthy homes across our District (see also Aim 2 above).	X		Ongoing
	3.1.2	SA	Devise and implement an 'Empty Homes Policy', bringing long term empty properties back into use and taking appropriate enforcement action against owners that do not comply. Properties that are deemed as 'long term empty' can be identified through collaborative working with our colleagues at Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP). This policy will have a flexible approach to second and holiday homes in discussion with the property owners. The policy will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Details of the risks of keeping a home empty</li> <li>• The additional costs involved in managing an empty home</li> <li>• The phenomenal housing need and the positive impact bringing an empty home back into use could make.</li> </ul>		X	Dec-26
	3.1.3	SA	Expand the existing Private Sector Leasing (PSL) scheme, operating currently in Breckland, for Temporary Accommodation purposes, initially.		X	Ongoing
To ensure that people can move home or have adaptations made to a home that no longer meets their needs.	3.2.1	SH	Pursue opportunities to increase grant funding, maximising prospects of improving the health and wellbeing of residents through energy efficiency and adaptations, ensuring residents can remain in their own homes for longer.	X		Ongoing

KEY	
	Confident can achieve
	Collaborative commitments
PR	Planning Related
SH	Strategic Housing
SA	Stand Alone



**Strategic Priority 4** Support vulnerable residents to access suitable homes and have housing choice

Aim	Reference	Category	Action required	Resources		Target
				Existing	Additional	
Build strong, meaningful, and person-centred relationships with our residents, enabling staff to intervene early, appropriately, and effectively and to provide specialist interventions for those with multiple and complex needs	4.1.1	SH	Build on the use of our 'Breckland Collaboration meetings'. This will provide effective and co-ordinated multi agency intervention with a strategic approach to matters including prevention duties.	X		Ongoing
	4.1.2	SH	Enable / Facilitate temporary accommodation solutions where necessary and feasible e.g. modular accommodation such as ZPODS.	x		Ongoing
	4.1.3	SH	Continue effective collaboration with the stakeholder group established during the housing strategy development exercise.	X		Ongoing
Work with colleagues across specialisms and alongside our voluntary community partners to create sustainable, resilient, and safe communities	4.2.1	SH	Work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to promote the delivery of our Housing Strategy.	X		Ongoing
	4.2.2	SH	Become a Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accredited organisation.	X		Dec-24
	4.2.3	SH	Devise and implement a Domestic Abuse strategy.	X		Dec-24
	4.2.4	SH	Launch campaign surrounding the Housing Strategy which includes: • Promotional activity surrounding 'launching' and 'kickstarting delivery' of the various actions set out in the Delivery Plan, in collaboration with partners	X	X	Ongoing
Assist people to access suitable choice-based housing, have a sense of belonging and feel that they want to participate in their local community	4.3.1	SH	Proactively work in collaboration with VCSE groups to meet specialist accommodation needs.	X		Dec-24
	4.3.2	SH	Create a Supported Accommodation / Independent Living Strategy in collaboration with Norfolk County Council.	X		TBC
	4.3.3	PR / SH	Complete an accommodation needs assessment for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show People to assist in allocating sites for development. Further action may be required because of this assessment.	X	X	Jul-25
	4.3.4	SH	Improve the use of alternative/innovative approaches to Temporary Accommodation for those in the greatest housing need by: · Proactively using the Local Authority Housing Fund to acquire properties for temporary accommodation use · Proactively seek alternative approaches to temporary accommodation, including nationwide best practice and initiatives	X		Ongoing

KEY	
■	Confident can achieve
■	Collaborative commitments
PR	Planning Related
SH	Strategic Housing
SA	Stand Alone

## APPENDIX 2 – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Affordable Housing** - Affordable housing includes Social Rent, Affordable Rent and Intermediate housing including Low-Cost Home Ownership options, and from 2016 Starter Homes, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

**Business rates** - A charge on most non-domestic properties, like shops; offices; pubs; warehouses; factories; holiday rental homes or guest houses.

**Care Leaver** - A person aged 25 or under, who has been looked after by a local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14; and who was looked after by the local authority at school-leaving age or after that date.

**Choice Based Letting Scheme** - Choice based lettings allow people to bid for available Affordable Rent and Social Rent properties which are then allocated to the bidder with the highest priority for housing.

**Community led housing** - Projects that are led by community groups ensuring new homes are built and empty homes and buildings can be brought back into use to meet local housing needs.

**Custom and Self Build (CSB)** - Projects defined as those where someone directly organises the design and construction of their own home.

**Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)** - A means-tested grant that enables the home of disabled homeowners and private tenants to be adapted to meet their needs, with for example, a walk-in shower or stair lift.

**Green Belt** - An area of open land around urban areas, on which building is restricted.

**Gypsy** - A member of a race of people originating in South Asia and traditionally having an itinerant way of life, living widely dispersed across Europe and North and South America.

**Help to Buy** - A government scheme that offers buyers an equity loan they can use to help to buy a new build home.

**Home Improvement Agency (HIA)** - An organisation that provides services to vulnerable people who are private homeowners or tenants of private landlords in order to help them stay in their own homes.

**Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)** - The national housing and regeneration delivery agency for England, with the role to contribute to

economic growth by enabling and helping communities to deliver high-quality housing that people can afford. The HCA is also the regulator for all Registered providers or Housing Associations.

**Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)** - A House of Multiple Occupation is a dwelling that is occupied by more than one household who share basic amenities such as WC, washing, cooking and food preparation facilities.

**Homelessness** - Where a household has no right to occupy accommodation and has to source alternative accommodation.

**Housing Allocation** - Where a household is housed through Choice Based Lettings into a property.

**Housing Associations** - Non-profit making organisations that provide low-cost "social housing" for people in need of a home. Any trading surplus is used to maintain existing housing and to help finance new homes.

**Housing Benefit & Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** - Financial assistance offered by the Government to eligible people on low incomes, whether they are working or not, to help to pay all or part of their rent. Currently being incorporated within a single benefit - Universal Credit.

**Housing Need** - Defined as the number of households who lack their own housing or live in unsuitable housing and who cannot afford to meet their needs in the market.

**Housing Register** - A list of the people who are 16 and over, who are interested in being considered for council or housing association properties and are eligible to join the list.

**Intermediate Housing** - Housing at prices and rents above those of social rent but below market price or rents.

**Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)** - A business-led partnership between local authorities and local private-sector businesses.

**Local Housing Allowance** - A method to calculate the maximum amount people renting from a private landlord can claim in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

**Local Economic Partnership (LEP)** - Partnerships between local authorities and businesses set up to help determine local economic priorities and lead economic growth and job creation within the local area.

**Local Plan** - A strategy guides decisions on future development proposals and addresses the needs and opportunities of the area.



**Long Term Empty Properties** - Residential properties that have remained unoccupied for at least six months (and are not categorised as exempt).

**National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** - The national framework introduced in March 2012 is the government's overarching planning policy document. It sets out the government's planning priorities for England and outlines an expectation for how the associated policies should be applied, including the development of Affordable Housing.

**Nutrient Neutrality** - a means of ensuring that a development plan or project does not add to existing nutrient burdens within catchments, so there is no net increase in nutrients as a result of the plan or project.

**Owner Occupation** - Properties owned outright by the occupier or being bought by the occupier with a mortgage.

**Prevention Duty** - If a person is threatened with homelessness, the authority has a duty to help prevent them becoming homeless.

**Private Rented Sector** - All rented property other than that rented from local authorities and housing associations. Registered Provider (RP) All providers of social housing who are registered with the Homes & Communities Agency

**Registered Provider** - Can be either a non-profit organisation or a profit-making organisation and include housing associations.

**Relief Duty** - If the person is already homeless, the authority has a duty to help them secure accommodation for at least six months.

**Rough Sleeping** - Defined by the government as 'people sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air (such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters); people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, station).'

**Rural Exception Site** - Rural exceptions site can be developed where there is an identified need for affordable homes for local people. They are usually small sites on land within or adjoining existing small rural communities which would not otherwise be given planning permission for new homes.

**Section 106 Agreements** - Through negotiation, a planning obligation can be imposed whereby a proportion of new homes must be made available for affordable housing (e.g. for rent or low-cost home ownership).

**Shared Ownership** - A way of buying a share of a property, and paying rent for the remainder, usually to a housing association.

**Sheltered Housing** - Accommodation for sale or rent exclusively to elderly older people, often with estate management services, emergency alarm system and warden service.

**Showpeople** - Members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows (whether or not travelling together as such).

**Stakeholders** - Individuals, groups or organisations with an interest or concern in something.

**Starter Homes** - A form of affordable Housing for first time buyers between the ages of 23 and 40. These homes will be sold at no more than 80% of open market value, capped at £450,000 in greater London and £250,000 across the rest of England.

**Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)** - A study into the local housing market that assesses housing need and demand to inform the development of the Housing Strategy and Local Plan.

**Social housing** - Housing provided for people on low incomes or with particular needs by government agencies or non-profit organizations.

**Social Mobility** - the movement of individuals, families, households, or other categories of people within or between social strata in a society.

**Supported or Specialist Housing** - The term describing housing for a particular client group e.g. older people, people with a disability or suffering from mental illness.

**Sustainable Communities / Development** - Based on the idea that the quality of people's lives and communities, are affected by a combination of economic, social and environmental factors. Sustainability is achieved by understanding the links between these factors.

**Temporary Accommodation** - Accommodation provided by the local authority to homeless households pending enquiries into their homeless application and to homeless households accepted as being homeless.

**Traveller** - A member of a community traditionally having an itinerant way of life.

**Universal Credit** - A new type of benefit designed to support people who are on a low income or out of work. It will replace six existing benefits and is currently being rolled out across the UK. The new system is based on a single monthly payment, transferred directly into a bank account.

**VCSE** - Voluntary, community and social enterprises.





Breckland  
COUNCIL