

# Building for the Future

The Role of County Councils  
in Meeting Housing Need



## **Building for the Future – The Role of County Councils in Meeting Housing Need TCPA, for the County Councils Network**

### **Contributors**

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### **Acknowledgements**

The TCPA is extremely grateful to everyone who contributed their time and feedback to the case studies, online survey and roundtable debate that informed this report.

This report aims to reflect the opinions of a wide range of local authorities and private and voluntary groups, but not every detail contained within it will reflect the opinions of all the contributors to this work. It should, however, reflect the spirit of constructive collaboration and considered debate.



### **County Councils Network (CCN)**

Founded in 1997, the County Councils Network (CCN) is a network of 36 county councils and unitary authorities that serve county areas. The CCN is a cross-party organisation, expressing the views of member councils to the wider Local Government Association and to central government departments.



### **Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)**

Founded in 1899, the TCPA is the UK's oldest independent charity focused on planning and sustainable development. Through its work over the last century, the Association has improved the art and science of planning both in the UK and abroad. The TCPA puts social justice and the environment at the heart of policy debate, and seeks to inspire government, industry and campaigners to take a fresh perspective on major issues, including planning policy, housing, regeneration and climate change.

The TCPA's objectives are:

- To secure a decent, well designed home for everyone, in a human-scale environment combining the best features of town and country.
- To empower people and communities to influence decisions that affect them.
- To improve the planning system in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

# Building for the Future

## The Role of County Councils in Meeting Housing Need

# Contents

2	<b>Foreword</b>
3	<b>Executive summary</b>
4	<b>Section 1 Introduction</b>
	1.1 The County Councils Network
	1.2 The project
	1.3 The research approach
	1.4 The housing challenge in England
	1.5 The policy context
	1.6 Affordable housing
	1.7 The structure of the report
7	<b>Section 2 Survey analysis</b>
	2.1 Housing affordability
	2.2 Local authority innovation
	2.3 Drivers for innovation
	2.4 Barriers to innovation
	2.5 A range of tenures
	2.6 Strategic planning
11	<b>Section 3 Case studies</b>
	3.1 Essex County Council
	3.2 Hertfordshire County Council
	3.3 Norfolk County Council
	3.4 Northumberland County Council
	3.5 Surrey County Council
22	<b>Section 4 Key lessons and recommendations</b>
	4.1 Leadership
	4.2 Unlocking public sector land
	4.3 The multiple benefits of delivering different housing tenures
	4.4 Specialist housing and an ageing population
	4.5 Homes for sale and rent
	4.6 Affordable housing
	4.7 The power of partnership
	4.8 Supporting community-led approaches
	4.9 Skills for delivery
	4.10 Strategic planning

# Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to present this new report to CCN's member councils, central government and the wider sector.

Housing is firmly established at the top of the political agenda and is here to stay. When we agreed the CCN business plan earlier this year, it was clear that housing had to be an essential element of it, given the affordability crisis currently gripping communities in county areas.

House prices in county areas are among the highest in the country and are at least nine times average earnings, according to new data published earlier this year. In contrast, affordable housing delivery in county areas is lowest when compared with metropolitan and urban areas, with just 26% of new homes being classed as affordable since 2011.

We know that we cannot rely on the private sector alone to address national housing issues. Local government, including counties, can play a vital role. Counties are already heavily involved in housing growth through our role as infrastructure and highways authorities and in our activities promoting economic growth. Roads, jobs and amenities are fundamental if we want to support new housing development.

Other parts of the sector have rightly been arguing for the lifting of the Housing Revenue Account cap to allow authorities to borrow more to build homes. However, as this report shows, county councils are

innovating to take matters into their own hands and deliver homes that meet the needs of their communities.

The case studies in this report show the range of innovative models available to deliver housing, and authorities have played to their strengths when setting up housing companies. This has had the benefits of both building new homes and providing a new source of income to counties at a time when they face severe funding pressures.

Key to this report are the recommendations on how to help counties do more. Ensuring that county councils are central to the new Statements of Common Ground would help to ensure that the right homes, whether built by councils or not, are constructed in the right places and supported by high-quality infrastructure. Amending the definition of 'best value' would allow us to ensure that our land is used for schemes that are best for the community, rather than maximising sales receipts. Investing in counties in order to grow our capacity and ensure that we have the right skills will help us to expand our role as housebuilders.

Counties remain ambitious for their communities, and we look forward to working with central government, local partners and the people we serve to deliver the homes that our country needs.

**Cllr Philip Atkins OBE**  
**CCN Spokesman for Housing, Planning & Infrastructure**

# Executive summary

This report of the Building for the Future project on the role of county councils in meeting housing need, undertaken by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) for the County Councils Network (CCN), provides valuable insight into what counties are already achieving under their current powers; sets out examples of leadership by pioneering councils who are unlocking the provision of new housing through partnerships and direct delivery; and gives an indication to the government of the skills and capacity that county councils and county unitary authorities already have in this area.

However, as the report illustrates, there is much more that county authorities can and want to do to address the housing challenges and opportunities in their local areas.

Based on the findings of an online survey of CCN members, a series of case studies and feedback from a high-level stakeholder roundtable, the report makes eight recommendations to the government to further unlock the potential of counties as powerful enablers and delivers of housing:

- The government should ensure that county councils and county unitary authorities are given a clearly defined role in the forthcoming Affordable Housing Green Paper, providing clear leadership to encourage county councillors and their authorities to think boldly about the role that they can play in helping to solve the housing crisis over the long term.
- The ‘best consideration’ test for public sector land requires review, as outlined in the government’s Housing White Paper, to ensure that county councils are not bound to sell sites on the basis of placing higher short-term receipts ahead of long-term social and economic gains.
- The government should introduce new minimum standards for access and inclusion to ensure that all new homes are built to provide for the nation’s ageing population and the needs of people with disabilities.
- The Housing White Paper states that the government wants ‘to see tenants that local authorities place in new affordable properties offered equivalent terms to those in council housing, including a right to buy their home’. If the right-to-buy rules are going to apply to homes built by local authority housing companies, the government must ensure that they are able to replace them on a one-to-one basis, enabling councils to retain 100% of their right-to-buy receipts, to ensure that their long-term investment programmes are not undermined.
- Homes England should recognise and encourage the leading role that county councils and county unitary authorities can play in creating joined-up approaches across sectors to meet housing need. There are benefits for the government in taking on board the experiences of county councils and county unitary authorities in scaling-up housing delivery to meet the country’s housing shortfall.
- The government’s Community Housing Fund is welcome, but needs to be continued and expanded to encourage the establishment of more community-led approaches.
- The government should make capacity funding available to enhance the skills and boost the capacity within county councils and county unitary authorities to enable them to innovate and expand their roles in delivering new housing of all tenures.
- The government should provide a clearly defined role for county councils in the strategic planning process. County councils should be formal signatories in a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG), especially concerning matters relating to housing, infrastructure, economic growth, education, and social care. The government should also indicate in guidance that an SoCG should normally be made over a county geography, giving district councils the capacity to plan for homes over a larger area and the county the ability to plan for infrastructure and service provision for the entire area that it is responsible for.

# Section 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 The County Councils Network

The County Councils Network (CCN) is a cross-party special-interest group of the Local Government Association, representing England's county authorities.

In total, the 36 county authorities that make up the CCN form England's largest grouping of councils (aside from the Local Government Association itself), with their 2,600 councillors representing 26 million people, and covering 86% of the country's landmass. Collectively, they are responsible for 41% of England's GVA and almost half the country's spending on child and adult social care, and they maintain 70% of local roads.

The CCN's 36 members include the 27 county councils and nine county unitary councils in England. County councils and county unitary authorities have different responsibilities for planning for housing. County councils are upper-tier authorities with responsibility for minerals and waste planning, whereas lower-tier authorities, such as district and borough councils, have responsibility for planning for housing. County unitary authorities are single-tier authorities with responsibility for planning and housing.

### 1.2 The project

The Building for the Future project aimed to showcase innovative county councils and county unitary authorities working on their own and in partnership to deliver high-quality homes and communities, through the findings of an online survey of CCN members, a series of case studies, and feedback from a high-level stakeholder roundtable.

The overarching objective of the project was to provide insight into what counties are already achieving under their current powers, give examples of leadership by pioneering councils who are unlocking new housing provision through partnerships and direct delivery, and give an indication to the government of the skills and capacity that county councils and county unitary authorities already have and what more they could do.

#### Box 1 Stakeholder roundtable attendees

Attendees at the high-level roundtable discussion held on 9 May 2018 included:

- **Cllr Philip Atkins**, Leader, Staffordshire County Council
- **Sarah Davis**, Senior Policy and Projects Officer, Chartered Institute of Housing
- **Peter French**, Senior Policy Officer, CCN
- **Kate Henderson**, Chief Executive, TCPA
- **James Maker**, Head of Policy and Communications, CCN
- **Graham Phillips**, Policy and Project Officer, Norfolk County Council
- **Henry Smith**, Projects and Policy Manager, TCPA
- **Cllr Martin Tett**, Leader, Buckinghamshire County Council
- **Nick Watson**, New Business Director, Places for People

This report aims to reflect the range of opinions expressed at the roundtable, but not every detail contained within it will reflect the opinions of all the attendees at the discussion. It should, however, reflect the spirit of constructive collaboration and considered debate.

### 1.3 The research approach

There were three components to the research project:

- an online survey, conducted between 13 April and 3 May 2018, sent to the County Councils Network's 36 members;
- analysis of five case studies showcasing the approaches being brought forward by Essex County Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Norfolk County Council, Northumberland County Council and Surrey County Council; and
- an expert roundtable discussion held on 9 May 2018 in Westminster to test the analysis and draft recommendations (see Box 1).

## 1.4

### The housing challenge in England

As the demand for new homes continues to exceed supply, affordability has become a critical concern across the country. The latest government figures, published by the Office for National Statistics in April 2018, highlight the scale of the affordability crisis, revealing that:

*'On average, full-time workers could expect to pay around 7.8 times their annual workplace-based earnings on purchasing a home in England and Wales in 2017, a significant increase of 2.4% since 2016.'*<sup>1</sup>

As highlighted by the CCN:

*'The housing crisis is not confined to cities and the south-east; prices in many other county areas are becoming increasingly unaffordable, with property prices rising treble the amount of house price rises in London. There is also a lack of affordable homes in county areas, with just 26% of new homes built since 2011 being classified as affordable.'*<sup>2</sup>

While private sector developers play an important role in building homes in England, they are incapable of delivering the number of homes needed on their own. The public sector has historically played the role of filling the gap, and as recently as 1980 councils built 88,530 homes in one year alone.<sup>3</sup> Since this time there has been a decline in the number of homes built by councils, with housing associations taking on the role.

In addition, each year far more social rented and affordable homes are lost in England than are being built. In 2016/17, 41,500 affordable homes were built in England, and of these only 5,380 were available for social rent.

## 1.5

### The policy context

The government's Housing White Paper,<sup>4</sup> published in February 2017, acknowledges that the housing market is broken and recognises the role that councils can play in building homes. Chapters 3 and 4 of the Housing White Paper include policies and measures

to diversify the housing market in a way which has relevance to a council's ability to deliver social and affordable housing, including support for local authorities to establish local housing companies and joint ventures.

The Housing White Paper states (in paragraph 3.28) that: *'local authorities are using innovative new models to get homes built in their area. There are a number of good examples of Local Development Corporations, local housing companies and/or joint venture models building mixed sites, which include new market housing for sale or private rent, as well as affordable housing. We welcome innovations like these, and want more local authorities to get building. To that end we will seek to address the issues that hold them back. However, we want to see tenants that local authorities place in new affordable properties offered equivalent terms to those in council housing, including a right to buy their home.'*

Of particular relevance to county councils, paragraph A.13 of the Housing White Paper indicated that a 'Statement of Common Ground' would be introduced, requiring groups of neighbouring authorities to sign up and come together and plan for homes and infrastructure in an area. It states that the government 'would like to see more and better joint working where planning issues go beyond individual authorities, building on the existing duty to co-operate' and that the government 'will consult on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework so that authorities are expected to prepare a Statement of Common Ground, setting out how they intend to work together to meet housing requirements that cut across authority boundaries'.

## 1.6

### Affordable housing

In recent years there has been an ongoing debate about the definition of affordable housing, with the government adding new tenures and products such as 'starter homes'. The use of the term 'affordable housing' in this report is based on the government's definition, as set out in the draft revised National

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Housing Affordability in England and Wales: 2017*. Statistical Bulletin. Office for National Statistics, Apr. 2018. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/housingaffordabilityinenglandandwales/2017>
- <sup>2</sup> 'CCN and Town and Country Planning Association join together in new housing project'. News Release. County Councils Network, 13 Apr. 2018. <https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/ccn-and-town-and-country-planning-association-join-together-in-new-housing-project/>
- <sup>3</sup> 'House building: permanent dwellings completed, by tenure, United Kingdom historical calendar year series'. Live Table on House Building 241. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building>
- <sup>4</sup> *Fixing Our Broken Housing Market*. Cm 9352. Housing White Paper. Department for Communities and Local Government, Feb. 2017. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/590464/Fixing\\_our\\_broken\\_housing\\_market\\_-\\_print\\_ready\\_version.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/590464/Fixing_our_broken_housing_market_-_print_ready_version.pdf)

## Box 2

### The government's definition of affordable housing

The definition of affordable housing set out below is taken from the glossary to the draft revised National Planning Policy Framework (on page 62), which was published for public consultation between 5 March and 10 May 2018:

**'Affordable housing:** housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers); and which complies with one or more of the following definitions:

- a) **Affordable housing for rent:** meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the Government's rent policy, or is at least 20% below local market rents (including service charges where applicable); (b) the landlord is a registered provider, except where it is included as part of a Build to Rent scheme (in which case the landlord need not be a registered provider); and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. For Build to Rent schemes affordable housing for rent is expected to be the normal form of affordable housing provision (and, in this context, is known as Affordable Private Rent).
- b) **Starter homes:** is as specified in Sections 2 and 3 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and any secondary legislation made under these sections. The definition of a starter home should reflect the meaning set out in statute at the time of plan-preparation or decision-making. Income restrictions should be used to limit a household's eligibility to purchase a starter home to those who have maximum household incomes of £80,000 a year or less (or £90,000 a year or less in Greater London).
- c) **Discounted market sales housing:** is that sold at a discount of at least 20% below local market value. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Provisions should be in place to ensure housing remains at a discount for future eligible households.
- d) **Other affordable routes to home ownership:** is housing provided for sale that provides a route to ownership for those who could not achieve home ownership through the market. It includes shared ownership, relevant equity loans, other low cost homes for sale and rent to buy (which includes a period of intermediate rent). Where public grant funding is provided, there should be provisions for the homes to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for any receipts to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision, or refunded to Government or the relevant authority specified in the funding agreement.'

Source: National Planning Policy Framework: Draft Text for Consultation. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Mar. 2018. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/685289/Draft\\_revised\\_National\\_Planning\\_Policy\\_Framework.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/685289/Draft_revised_National_Planning_Policy_Framework.pdf)

Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (see Box 2). Although not explicitly referenced in the revised draft NPPF definition, the provision of social rented homes is also considered a key type of affordable housing in this study.

## 1.7

### The structure of the report

This report is organised in four parts. Following the introduction, Section 2 sets out findings from the

online survey of CCN members. Section 3 showcases learning from five proactive county councils and county unitary authorities through case studies from each.

Finally, Section 4 sets out a series of recommendations for government.

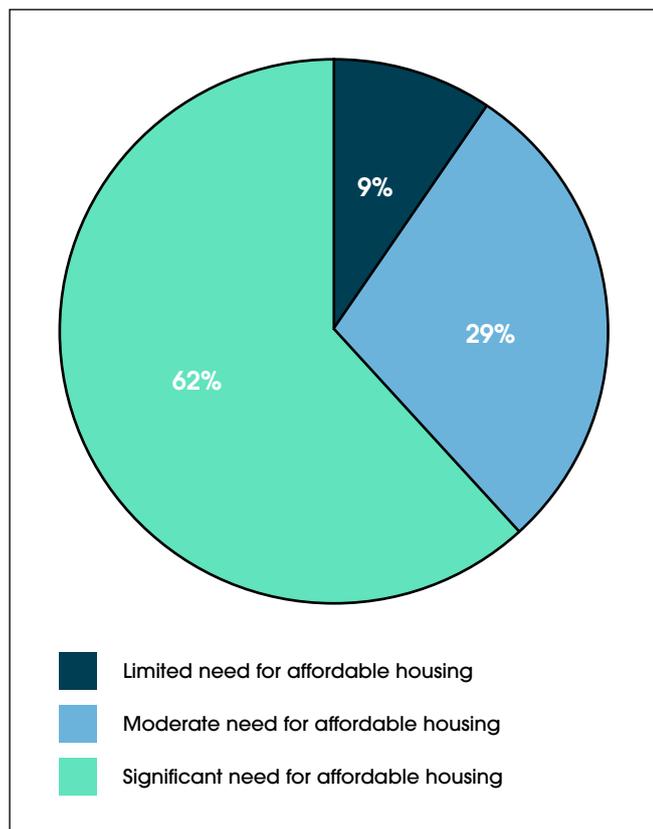
# Section 2

## Survey analysis

An online survey of the CCN's 36 members in England (27 county councils and nine unitary councils) was conducted between 13 April and 3 May 2018. Over half of CCN's members responded. Of the 21 councils that completed the survey, 16 were county councils and five were county unitary authorities.

### 2.1 Housing affordability

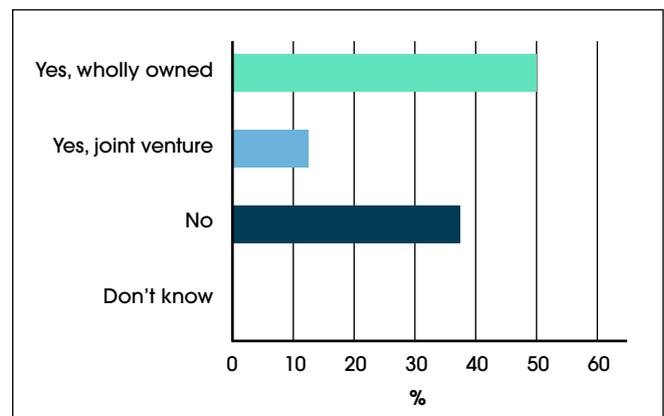
Of the 21 county council and county unitary authorities that replied to the survey question 'How would you characterise the need for affordable homes (i.e. homes available for subsidised or social rent) in your local authority area?', 62% described their need as 'severe', a further 29% described their need as 'moderate', and 9% described their need as 'limited'.



Identified need for affordable housing

### 2.2 Local authority innovation

County councils and county unitary authorities are exploring new models of delivering homes in their local areas. Twenty-one councils responded to the survey question 'Are you currently considering or have you already set up a local housing company?'. Of the five county unitary councils that responded, three had set up a local authority housing company as a wholly owned subsidiary of the council and two councils had not. Of the 16 county councils that responded to the question, eight had already set up a local authority housing company, two had set up a joint venture and six had not done either.



Consideration given to setting up a local housing company

### 2.3 Drivers for innovation

The main motivation for county councils and county unitary authorities to establish – or explore establishing – local authority housing companies is generating revenue for the council, with 76% of councils identifying this as a priority. Of the 13 councils that said generating revenue was a main benefit, 11 were county councils and two were county unitary authorities.

The second most popular reason for setting up new delivery vehicles given by CCN members was utilising council-owned land (65%). Meeting specialist housing

need (53%), affordable housing need (47%) and general housing need (47%) were all popular answers.

**Drivers for innovation**

Councils were asked to list their top five motivations for setting up (or exploring the possibility of setting up) a local authority housing company; 17 councils answered this question

Meeting general housing need	<b>8 (47%)</b>
Meeting affordable housing need	<b>8 (47%)</b>
Meeting specialist housing need	<b>9 (53%)</b>
Meeting the aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	<b>2 (12%)</b>
Generating revenue for the council	<b>13 (76%)</b>
Utilising the council’s skills and capacity	<b>1 (6%)</b>
Utilising council-owned land	<b>11 (65%)</b>
Control over the quality of development	<b>6 (35%)</b>
Control over the speed of development	<b>5 (29%)</b>
Opportunity for partnership working with districts	<b>4 (24%)</b>
Not considering setting up a local housing delivery company	<b>2 (12%)</b>

**2.4 Barriers to innovation**

CCN members were asked to identify the main challenges when setting up (or considering setting up) a local housing company. Over two-thirds of the responding councils stated that a lack of skills and capacity within the council was a barrier to innovation, and half of councils identified infrastructure delivery as a barrier.

**Barriers to innovation**

Councils were asked to list the top challenges when setting up (or exploring the possibility of setting up) a local authority housing company; 16 councils answered this question

Land availability	<b>2 (13%)</b>
Lack of skills and capacity within the council	<b>11 (69%)</b>
Lack of access to funding	<b>1 (6%)</b>
Lack of political appetite	<b>2 (13%)</b>
Lack of public support	<b>1 (6%)</b>
Planning consent	<b>6 (38%)</b>
Infrastructure delivery	<b>8 (50%)</b>
Government policy	<b>5 (31%)</b>
Not considering setting up a local housing delivery company	<b>3 (19%)</b>



Henry Smith

## 2.5 A range of housing tenures

County councils and unitary authorities are currently delivering or exploring the delivery of different housing tenures in their areas. Nine (45%) of the councils that responded to the survey question on tenures stated that they are currently delivering specialist housing such as extra care, and 45% are exploring the delivery of private market homes and shared-ownership homes.

<b>Housing tenures</b> Councils were asked to list the tenures that they were exploring or delivering; 21 councils answered this question	
Yes – currently delivering private market homes for sale	3 (15%)
Yes – exploring delivering private market homes for sale	9 (45%)
Yes – currently delivering private rented homes	0 (0%)
Yes – exploring the private rented sector as an option	7 (35%)
Yes – currently delivering shared-ownership homes	2 (10%)
Yes – exploring delivering shared-ownership homes	9 (45%)
Yes – currently delivering affordable rent homes (up to 80% market rent)	5 (25%)
Yes – exploring delivering affordable rent homes (up to 80% market rent)	8 (40%)
Yes – currently delivering social rented homes	3 (15%)
Yes – exploring delivering social rented homes	7 (35%)
Yes – currently delivering specialist housing such as extra care	9 (45%)
Yes – exploring delivering specialist housing such as extra care	7 (35%)
No	3 (15%)
Don't know	1 (5%)

## 2.6 Strategic planning

The final question in the online survey was for county councils only (i.e. not county unitary authorities). The Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 and the draft revised National Planning Policy Framework include new requirements for strategic plans. The county councils were asked whether they would be interested in taking on strategic planning for housing: 13 of the 15 county councils that responded to this question said yes; the other two councils did not know.

<b>Interest in taking on strategic planning for housing</b> County councils (not county unitaries) were asked if they would be interested in taking on strategic planning for housing; 15 councils answered this question	
Yes	13 (87%)
No	0 (0%)
Don't know	2 (13%)

A number of county councils explained why they are interested in getting more involved in strategic planning, with explanations including the following:

- *'Over the longer term, given a polycentric settlement pattern, spatial planning will become more challenging, potentially requiring new settlements. This will require a more strategic approach.'*
- *'The council is currently a partner to the preparation of a long-term strategic growth plan which sets out the quantum and distribution of future housing provision. This work relies on effective collaboration across the two-tier arrangements in [the county] and with [the] neighbouring unitary city. There is always a risk that the work could be derailed by one partner failing to sign up to the prepared plan. This risk would be considerably minimised were the county council to have responsibility for the strategic planning of housing.'*
- *'[The council] would not envisage any strategic planning approach being solely concerned with housing. [The council] has been developing an informal spatial planning strategy with the local planning authorities, accompanied by a study of associated infrastructure requirements. [The council] is now considering taking this further.'*

## 10 Building for the Future – The Role of County Councils in Meeting Housing Need

### Section 2: Survey analysis

- *'It is a really important question and [the county council] may well be interested, but this has significant (local) political considerations as well as operational implications, so would need to seek a more formal view from political leaders.'*
- *'Districts are relatively too small to prepare comprehensive plans and often have huge restrictions covering much of their area, such as National Parks and SSIs. The duty to co-operate is complex and not effective.'*
- *'Since the revocation of the Structure Plan there has not been a strategic overview for housing provision across the county.'*



# Section 3

## Case studies

This Section provides an overview of the innovative approaches to enabling and delivering homes undertaken by the five case study councils:

- Essex County Council;
- Hertfordshire County Council;
- Norfolk County Council;
- Northumberland County Council; and
- Surrey County Council.

### Key lessons for county councils and county unitary authorities

The case studies showcase a range of innovative approaches being brought forward by county councils and county unitary authorities, including the following:

- local authority housing companies delivering a range of tenures, from market sale and rent through to affordable housing (including shared ownership, affordable rent and social rent) and specialist housing such as extra care;
- entrepreneurial approaches to maximising assets, particularly public sector land, by taking a direct stake in the development process and a more holistic approach to land value;
- the provision of specialist accommodation for older people and people with learning difficulties, generating savings against councils' social care budgets as well as meeting the needs of individuals and promoting independent living and better health outcomes;
- innovative partnerships and joint ventures working across the county area, offering the potential to enhance councils' financial resilience over the long term, in line with strategic objectives;
- special delivery units within councils, providing a high-level context for engagement with national government and other public sector partners, and the extensive skills and experience to support housing delivery alongside district councils; and
- improvements to the capacity of local groups and the pursuit of new ways of delivering affordable homes in rural areas through community-led housing, combining committed sums from developers with the funding available from the government for community-led housing.

### 3.1

## Essex County Council



CGI of the Rocheway housing development

### Context

Essex is home to 1.44 million people, living in the county's large towns, seaside communities and the countryside<sup>5</sup> – one in three people live in the countryside. Essex County Council has identified a need to build 180,000 new homes over the 20-year period from 2017 to 2037.

### Planning in Essex

Essex County Council has responsibility for minerals and waste planning, as well as determining planning applications for land and buildings owned by the council (such as schools) across Essex. At the strategic level, Essex County Council works with a range of partners to address cross-boundary strategic planning matters within and beyond Essex and to influence policy.

Within Essex there are 12 local planning authorities, made up of borough, district, and city councils. These lower-tier councils are each responsible for producing a Local Plan to shape how their communities develop in the future. They have a statutory duty to engage and work with Essex County Council in the preparation of their Local Plans. Essex County Council, in turn, is:

*'keen to understand and support the formulation of Local Plans, development strategies and policies, prepared by local planning authorities. Involvement*

*is necessary because of the County Council's role as:*

- a key partner within Greater Essex promoting economic development, regeneration, infrastructure delivery and new development throughout the County;
- the strategic highway and transport authority, including responsibility for the delivery of the Essex Local Transport Plan and as the local highway authority; local education authority; Minerals and Waste Planning Authority; Lead Local Flood Authority; and major provider of a wide range of local government services throughout the county of Essex; and
- an infrastructure funding partner, that seeks to ensure that the development allocations proposed are realistic and do not place an unnecessary cost burden on the County Council's Capital Programme.
- the County Council seeks opportunities to ensure the viable provision of its services to create sustainable communities, in the right place with the right infrastructure e.g. sustainable transport, schools and co-located community facilities.<sup>6</sup>

### 'Garden communities' in Essex

Essex County Council is working closely with several local planning authorities in the county to:  
*'bring forward substantial and transformational*

### Notes

5 Essex Organisation Strategy: An Easy Read Guide to Our 4 Year Plan. Essex County Council, 2017. [https://www.essex.gov.uk/Documents/Organisation\\_Strategy\\_easy\\_read\\_guide.pdf](https://www.essex.gov.uk/Documents/Organisation_Strategy_easy_read_guide.pdf)

6 'The planning process'. Webpage. Essex County Council, Nov. 2016. <https://www.essex.gov.uk/Environment%20Planning/Development-in-Essex/Pages/The-Planning-Process.aspx>

*growth to be delivered through new communities. This work includes a supporting and guiding role from the County Council, plus infrastructure planning and delivery; as well as lobbying government to help strengthen the case for assistance and funding to promote delivery of the ambitious new settlements initiative.<sup>7</sup>*

### **Dedicated housing growth unit**

Essex County Council has established a dedicated housing growth unit within the council. The council's ambition is to provide a strong housing offer for all parts of the community in Essex, and the housing unit's role is to work across the county, in partnership with colleagues within the county council and with the 12 local planning authorities, to help deliver their stretching ambitions for housing growth. The unit is also working across Essex to support the response to tackling homelessness, and to enable the provisions of better housing for vulnerable people.

Although the council is not a local planning authority, the expertise within the housing unit is designed to support the work of the councils within Essex and to provide a high-level context for facilitating engagement with government departments and agencies and other public sector partners. Essex County Council has appointed a team with extensive experience of housing and planning to help support the capacity and enhance the skills of the local planning authorities to overcome any challenges in the development process.

### **Essex Housing**

Essex Housing, which works county-wide to identify surplus land for development and make the most of taxpayer-owned assets, is hosted by Essex County Council on behalf of public sector partners across the county, including local planning authorities and public sector bodies. It has been operational since April 2016.

Essex Housing is underpinned by a recognition by Essex County Council and public sector partners that more can be done with their assets (particularly public sector land) by taking a direct stake in the development process and a more holistic approach to land value. Development sites are usually either under-utilised publicly owned assets or vacant sites, and Essex Housing manages the end-to-end development process, from land identification and scheme design through to securing planning consent, overseeing

contractor build, and marketing and sales of completed schemes.

Essex Housing is building a range of tenures, including affordable homes (meeting local needs), homes for market sale (which generate capital receipts), homes for private rent (which generate revenue), and specialist accommodation for older people and people with learning difficulties (which meets local needs as well as generating savings against Essex County Council's social care budget).

In the past two years Essex Housing has already progressed a number of successful developments, including Goldlay Gardens in Chelmsford and Rocheway in Rochford. Goldlay Gardens includes 32 homes in three new apartment blocks which are a mix of private and specialist housing built on a site that was formerly Essex County Council's library headquarters. The scheme is due for completion in September 2018.<sup>8</sup>

The Rocheway development in Rochford is on the site of a former 1930s school and more recently an adult learning facility. Essex Housing has plans for a 60-apartment extra-care facility and for 14 homes for private sale. Rochford District Council approved the planning application for the site in March 2018.<sup>9</sup>

### **Key lessons**

- Essex County Council's dedicated housing growth unit provides a high-level context for engagement with national government and other public sector partners, and the extensive expertise of the team is a valuable resource for the local planning authorities in the county.
- By taking a holistic approach to land value, Essex Housing facilitates savings and increased capital receipts across the public sector. By providing specialist accommodation for older people and people with learning difficulties, Essex Housing is generating savings against Essex County Council's social care budget, as well as meeting the needs of individuals and promoting independent living and better health outcomes.
- By providing a range of housing tenures, Essex Housing is able to generate capital receipts through market sales and revenue streams through market rent.

### **Notes**

7 'The planning process'. Webpage. Essex County Council, Nov. 2016. <https://www.essex.gov.uk/Environment%20Planning/Development-in-Essex/Pages/The-Planning-Process.aspx>

8 R Brown: 'Old library site starts a new chapter as council unveils £42m land plan'. *Chronicle*, 9 Feb. 2017

9 *Planning Decisions – March 2018*. Application No. 17/00102/FUL. Rochford District Council, Mar. 2018. [https://www.rochford.gov.uk/sites/default/files/planning\\_dec\\_monthlymarc18.pdf](https://www.rochford.gov.uk/sites/default/files/planning_dec_monthlymarc18.pdf)

## 3.2

### Herfordshire County Council



Proposed housing development at Baldock

#### Context

Hertfordshire has a population of over 1.1 million and 483,000 households.<sup>10</sup> A significant growth in population, of 252,000 people, is predicted by 2039 – an increase of 21%.<sup>11</sup> The population is also ageing, with the number of people over 80 in Hertfordshire set to increase by 49% by 2039.<sup>12</sup> The average sale price of a house in Hertfordshire in early 2018 was £464,600.<sup>13</sup> The Hertfordshire Corporate Plan includes the aim of seeing ‘housing developments of the appropriate design, location and scale, built to meet the needs of Hertfordshire’s economy and residents’.<sup>14</sup> The plan also sets an objective of seeing ‘a greater choice of housing options that meet the needs of each individual’.<sup>15</sup>

There are ten district and borough councils in Hertfordshire, including four towns with a population of over 50,000: Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage, Watford,

and St Albans. The county is home to the world’s first two Garden Cities at Letchworth and Welwyn.

#### Planning in Hertfordshire

The development plan in Hertfordshire consists of the district/borough Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, the Waste Core Strategy and Development Management Policies document, the Waste Site Allocations document, and the Minerals Local Plan. Hertfordshire County Council deals with planning for minerals and waste and planning for county services such as schools, libraries and roads.

The Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership is a forum that has been established for joint working on infrastructure and planning issues. The work of the partnership includes review of the London Plan and other significant regional and sub-regional strategies.

#### Notes

10 ‘Housing and transport’. Herts Insight webpage. Hertfordshire County Council. <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/herts-insight/topics/housing-and-transport.aspx>

11 *Hertfordshire’s Local Transport Plan: Draft for Public Consultation*. Hertfordshire County Council, Nov. 2017.

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/about-the-council/consultations/ltpl4-local-transport-plan-draft.pdf>

12 ‘Housing and transport’. Herts Insight webpage. Hertfordshire County Council. <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/herts-insight/topics/housing-and-transport.aspx>

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Hertfordshire: County of Opportunity. Corporate Plan 2013-2017*. Hertfordshire County Council, 2013.

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/about-the-council/data-and-information/corporate-plan-2013-2017.pdf>

15 *Ibid.*

One of the key objectives of the partnership is to work co-operatively within Hertfordshire and across county borders according to the principles of localism and the duty to co-operate.<sup>16</sup>

Membership of the partnership includes all local authorities in Hertfordshire. The partnership also works together with Hertfordshire Forward (the Local Strategic Partnership), Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, the Hertfordshire Local Transport Body, the Local Nature Partnership for Hertfordshire and other appropriate organisations in areas of shared interest ‘to develop and where possible and necessary agree joint approaches to common issues’.<sup>17</sup> The partnership aims to ‘work together to develop and maintain a shared Strategic Planning Framework for the County that will be consistent with the proposals of each constituent local authority and will set out the broad strategic direction and infrastructure needs of Hertfordshire’.

### Herts Living Limited

Hertfordshire County Council believes that ‘it is important to exploit opportunities to use the Council’s buying power and land to help address the county’s housing and service needs’.<sup>18</sup> To further this intention, in July 2017 the council’s cabinet approved plans for the creation of a new property company to deliver 6,000 homes in Hertfordshire across the next 15 years. The new company, Herts Living Limited, ‘will be responsible for the development and delivery of the new homes, in addition to assisted living accommodation, and will help the council to increase the financial returns on land it no longer uses’.<sup>19</sup>

At the point of setting up the property company, the council announced its intention to enter into a joint venture partnership with a private sector partner that will add property development expertise. The joint venture model will ensure that the council ‘is able to take a share of the developer profits by either selling or renting the properties in the future’.<sup>20</sup>

### Chalkdene Developments

Following an OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) procurement process, in April 2018 a joint

venture was announced between Hertfordshire County Council and Morgan Sindall Investments, to deliver an estimated 500 new properties in the region. The new company, known as Chalkdene Developments, will be a 50:50 partnership between Herts Living Limited and Morgan Sindall Investments’ subsidiary, Community Solutions for Regeneration (Hertfordshire) Limited.

The partnership is anticipated to be in effect for 15 years, and will initially focus on delivering housing in 12 locations. It also has the potential to deliver schemes under the government’s One Public Estate initiative, a national development programme delivered by a partnership of the Local Government Association and the Cabinet Office’s Government Property Unit. In addition, there is potential that it could work on behalf of other public sector authorities in the county.

In order to achieve the most economically advantageous outcome for Hertfordshire County Council, the partnership will focus on three key areas:

- achieving greater profits than would be achieved by the disposal of land to the market;
- driving the pace of delivery through a partner with scale; and
- optimising the impact of development by well considered design, procurement and construction.

### Key lessons

- Hertfordshire County Council is committed to finding new ways to use its land and assets to unlock housing growth. Consequently it has taken the ambitious step of setting up a property company with the intention of delivering 6,000 homes with a £2 billion gross development value.
- The council is aiming to combine the best of the private and public sectors, harnessing the property development expertise of Morgan Sindall Investments through a joint venture, the first phase of which concentrates on developing 500 new properties in 12 locations across the county.<sup>21</sup>
- The Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership is a good example of collaborative working on infrastructure and planning issues.

### Notes

<sup>16</sup> *Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership Terms of Reference*. Hertfordshire County Council, Amended Jun. 2016.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/environment-and-planning/planning/hipp-terms-of-reference-june-2016-final.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> *Hertfordshire County Council Annual Report 2016/17*. Hertfordshire County Council, 2016. <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/about-the-council/data-and-information/annual-report-201617.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> ‘Hertfordshire County Council to create own property company so that tax payers reap rewards’. Press Release. Hertfordshire County Council, 14 Jul. 2017. <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/news/news-blog-articles/hertfordshire-county-council-to-create-own-property-company-so-that-tax-payers-reap-rewards.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> W Eichler: ‘Council signs joint venture agreement to deliver 500 homes’. *LocalGov*, 18 Apr. 2018.

<https://www.localgov.co.uk/Council-signs-joint-venture-agreement-to-deliver-500-homes-/45143>

### 3.3

## Norfolk County Council



Part of Bowthorpe Care Village

### Context

Norfolk is home to 877,700 people (as of mid-2014), 40% of which live in the county's four large urban centres (Norwich, King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth, and Thetford). The 'majority of the rest of the population live in 15 market towns'.<sup>22</sup>

In *A Vision for Norfolk in 2021*,<sup>23</sup> which sets out the council's strategic priorities for the next three years, Cliff Jordan, Leader of Norfolk County Council, notes that 'Norfolk's population will reach one million in the next two decades. If we can prepare for that now, that should bring great potential.' Councillor Jordan goes on to highlight that he wants:

*'the council to play a leading role in:*

- *Building communities we can be proud of*
- *Installing infrastructure first*
- *Building new homes to help young people get on the housing ladder'*

Norfolk County Council's vision document highlights that '80,000 new homes will be needed', alongside a focus on helping the 'population remain independent, resilient and well'. Norfolk has an ageing population, with the number of people aged between 75 and 84 years old projected to increase by 32.9% in the next decade, and the number of people aged 85 years old

and over projected to increase by 39.7%. While the number of children aged under 15 is also projected to increase, overall there is little change projected over the decade for younger adults and the middle aged.<sup>24</sup>

### Planning in Norfolk

Norfolk County Council has responsibility for minerals and waste planning, whereas housing development is determined by the seven local authority districts within Norfolk. The seven local planning authorities and Norfolk County Council:

- 'have a long track record of working together to achieve shared objectives. In early 2015 they, working through its strategic planning member forum, agreed to formally cooperate on a range of strategic cross-boundary planning issues through the preparation of [the] Norfolk Strategic Framework. The aim of producing the framework is to:*
- *Agree shared objectives and strategic priorities to improve outcomes for Norfolk and inform the preparation of future Local Plans;*
  - *Demonstrate compliance with the duty to co-operate;*
  - *Find efficiencies in the planning system through working towards the establishment of a shared evidence base;*
  - *Influence subsequent high level plans (such as the Strategic Economic Plan); and*

### Notes

- 22 'Living and working in Norfolk'. Webpage. Norfolk County Council. <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/jobs-training-and-volunteering/living-and-working-in-norfolk>
- 23 *Caring for Our County: A Vision for Norfolk in 2021*. Norfolk County Council, Feb. 2018. <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/policy-performance-and-partnerships/policies-and-strategies/corporate/council-vision-and-strategy>
- 24 'Living and working in Norfolk'. Webpage. Norfolk County Council. <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/jobs-training-and-volunteering/living-and-working-in-norfolk>

- *Maximise the opportunities to secure external funding to deliver against agreed objectives.*<sup>25</sup>

The Norfolk Strategic Framework notes that the Norfolk authorities will need to collectively plan for an additional 84,000 homes by 2036 (around 4,000 per annum).<sup>26</sup>

The Norfolk Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2017-2027 sets out how Norfolk County Council and its partners 'will work together to ensure existing and planned infrastructure links people to jobs, homes and local amenities as well as connecting business with customers' so as to 'unlock Norfolk's full potential'.<sup>27</sup> The Infrastructure Delivery Plan aims to 'help Norfolk County Council and partners to co-ordinate implementation, prioritise activity and respond to any funding opportunities'.

### The Norse Group

The Norse Group is a Norfolk County Council owned holding company with an annual turnover of £322 million and employing around 10,000 people (half of whom are based in Norfolk).<sup>28</sup> The Group provides a unique public-public partnership joint venture model, operating in three key divisions: facilities and waste management provider Norse Commercial Services; property consultancy services specialist NPS Group; and care services provider NorseCare Limited. In Norfolk the Norse Group returns, on average, £4 million to Norfolk County Council in profits each year, helping to boost public funds. While the Norse Group remains firmly committed to Norfolk, it now has:

*'24 joint venture companies across England providing a wide range of services. The Group has also continued to win work in competition and develop new long term income streams via a capital investment programme in waste recycling, care of the elderly, and renewable energy. Amid challenging times for the public sector, Norse Group offers significant and attractive benefits to a growing number of Local Authority partners. These include:*

- *Greater efficiency in service delivery*
- *Greater economy of service*
- *Strong customer-focused service*
- *Shared profits*
- *Support for the local economy and community.*<sup>29</sup>

### Notes

25 *Norfolk Strategic Framework: Shared Spatial Objectives for a Growing County*. Draft Version for Norfolk Strategic Planning Member Forum. Norfolk County Council, Jul. 2017. <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/-/media/norfolk/downloads/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/policy-performance-and-partnerships/partnerships/strategic-member-forum/draft-norfolk-strategic-framework-17-july-2017.pdf?la=en>

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Norfolk Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2017-2027*. Norfolk County Council, 2017. <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/-/media/norfolk/downloads/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/policy-performance-and-partnerships/policies-and-strategies/business/norfolk-infrastructure-delivery-plan-2017-2027.pdf>

28 *Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2016*. Norse Group, 2016. <http://www.ncsgrp.co.uk/downloads/Norse-Annual-Report-2016-FINAL.pdf>

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

### NorseCare

In April 2011 Norfolk County Council's portfolio of residential care homes and housing with care schemes was transferred to NorseCare, which delivers the management and operation of residential care homes for elderly people and care services in Norfolk. Since 2011 NorseCare has also opened a number of new residential care homes. In April 2016 NorseCare opened the £19 million Bowthorpe Care Village:

*'The 80 bed specialist dementia Care Home and 92-apartment Housing with Care scheme was built on a 2.3 hectare site and has attracted widespread council interest from across the country. There is a central 'Village Hub' housing a number of ancillary spaces including a café, restaurant, social club, meeting rooms, shop, hairdresser, beauty salon, library, and supporting office accommodation.'*<sup>30</sup>

The project, driven and co-ordinated by NorseCare, has resulted in an innovative partnership between Saffron Housing, the Homes and Communities Agency (now renamed Homes England), Norwich City Council, Norwich Clinical Commissioning Group and Norfolk County Council to deliver both housing with care and specialist dementia care facilities.

### Key lessons

- Norfolk County Council is working collaboratively with the seven district authorities to agree shared objectives and strategic priorities to improve outcomes for Norfolk, inform the preparation of future Local Plans, and maximise the opportunities to secure external funding to deliver against agreed objectives.
- By establishing the Norse Group, a revenue stream has been generated, returning, on average, £4 million in profits each year to the council.
- Norfolk has an ageing population, and the council has a vision to ensure that the population remains independent, resilient and well. By investing in new residential care facilities, such as the Bowthorpe Care Village, the council – through NorseCare – is helping to ensure that elderly residents have suitable housing and care while reducing the long-term costs to the council and generating long-term revenue.

## 3.4 Northumberland County Council



*Courtesy of  
Northumberland  
County Council*

Northumberland County Council Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and Resilience, Cllr John Riddle, with Andy Dean, Chief Executive of CAN, at extra-care housing at Haltwhistle

### Context

Northumberland, the 'largest unitary authority by geographic coverage, is also the most sparsely populated in England with only 62 people per square kilometre'.<sup>31</sup> The 2015 mid-year population estimates indicate that Northumberland is home to around 315,000 people, an increase of 2.6% since 2001.<sup>32</sup> With no settlements being home to more than 40,000 residents, Northumberland is a largely rural county.<sup>33</sup>

### Planning in Northumberland

As a county unitary authority Northumberland has direct responsibility for planning for housing, unlike the other four case study authorities featured this

report, which are county councils (upper-tier authorities).

In March 2018 Northumberland County Council launched its first public consultation on a new Local Plan for the area, seeking to 'capture views on preferred strategic locations for housing and employment development and the big issues that the new Local Plan for Northumberland should seek to address'.<sup>34</sup> The public consultation on strategic locations will help to inform the new Local Plan, which the council is currently drafting and which is due to go to public consultation in summer 2018.

In addition to drawing up the new Local Plan, the council is also 'proposing to prepare ... Supplementary

### Notes

31 *A Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2013-2018*. Northumberland County Council, 2013.

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Housing/Housing-Strategy-2013-2018.pdf>

32 *Northumberland Demographic Analysis and Forecasts: County Level and Sub-County Level*. Edge Analytics, Mar. 2017.

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Studies%20and%20Evidence%20Reports/Demographic%20Studies/Demographic-Analysis-and-Forecasts-March-2017.pdf>

33 *A Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2013-2018*. Northumberland County Council, 2013.

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Housing/Housing-Strategy-2013-2018.pdf>

34 'Northumberland Local Plan'. Webpage. Northumberland County Council. <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Planning/Planning-policy/Plan.aspx#northumberlandlocalplan>

Planning Documents (SPDs) to provide additional guidance on the proposed policies in the Northumberland Local Plan and advice to assist in considering and determining planning applications',<sup>35</sup> including SPDs on affordable housing and design.

### Supporting community-led housing

Northumberland County Council has developed an innovative programme to support community-led housing. According to the council's *Community Housing Fund Policy* statement, 'community led housing is intended to bring social and economic benefits to local communities through the provision of housing which the local community has played a significant part in delivering'.<sup>36</sup>

As highlighted in a 2017 TCPA report for the Nationwide Foundation, 'the council has established a new system to reallocate funding contributed by certain developments for affordable housing (Section 106 contributions). In instances where it is not possible to spend the funding on site, the new system makes the funds available for community groups bidding to help deliver community-led housing'.<sup>37</sup>

In 2017 Northumberland County Council was allocated £1.34 million from the government's Community Housing Fund. The council is using this funding, together with funds from Section 106 contributions, to work in partnership with local communities to develop community-led housing through Community Action Northumberland (CAN). CAN was originally set up in 1951 as the Community Council of Northumberland, and today its role is to:

*'support and help sustain rural communities in Northumberland by:*

- *Promoting rural issues – providing and supporting a 'rural voice' to influence and tackle rural community issues.*
- *Empowering organisations – supporting and developing local community groups and organisations.*
- *Supporting individuals – identifying, developing and managing projects to address the needs of rural communities.'*<sup>38</sup>

The council is providing revenue to CAN from its allocation of the government's Community Housing Fund. CAN is 'working with Social Regeneration Consultants, Glendale Gateway Trust and others to ensure the support required by individual communities is available and to identify specific opportunities'.<sup>39</sup> CAN has surveyed parish and town councils and run a series of local workshops to provide more information about community-led housing. Training covers 'different models of community-led housing, the finance involved, assessing local housing need and the availability of funding'.<sup>40</sup> CAN also supports community-led housing by meeting with groups across Northumberland to discuss any specific ideas or opportunities.

Through the partnership with CAN, Northumberland County Council is supporting community-led housing groups, by providing legal advice and feasibility studies for potential schemes, as well as contributing capital funding to developments.

### Key lessons

- Northumberland County Council is helping to empower local communities to meet the need for affordable housing in the area through community-led housing.
- By combining commuted sums from developers with the funding available from the government for community-led housing, the council has, through its partnership with Community Action Northumberland, been able to improve the capacity of local groups and pursue a new way of delivering affordable homes in rural areas.

### Notes

35 'Northumberland Local Plan'. Webpage. Northumberland County Council. <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Planning/Planning-policy/Plan.aspx#northumberlandlocalplan>

36 *Community Housing Fund Policy*. Northumberland County Council, 2017. <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Housing/NCC-Community-Housing-Fund-Policy-2017.pdf>

37 *How Can Councils Secure the Delivery of More Affordable Homes? New Models, Partnerships and Innovations*. TCPA, Nov. 2017. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=84887d6c-08a1-4df4-b72b-0f3e56e212b4>

38 'About'. Northumberland CAN website. <http://www.ca-north.org.uk/about>

39 'Community approaches to delivery'. Northumberland CAN website. <http://www.ca-north.org.uk/promoting-rural-issues/housing/community-approaches-to-delivery>

40 'ACRE community-led housing trainings'. Webpage. National Community Land Trust Network. <http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/event/acre-community-led-housing-trainings—durham>

## 3.5 Surrey County Council



Housing in Surrey

### Context

Surrey is one of the most densely populated counties in the UK, with a population of 1.1 million. By 2022, there will be nearly 250,000 people aged over 65 in the county. This changing demography will have different needs and will place increasing demand on health and social care services.<sup>41</sup>

The county is divided into 11 districts and boroughs: Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Guildford, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley, and Woking. The largest town is Guildford, with a population of around 80,000. The county covers 1,600 square kilometres, and accounts for over 13% of the South East region's population. Approximately 73% of Surrey is designated Green Belt land (compared with 16% of the South East as a whole).<sup>42</sup>

### Notes

41 *Surrey County Council: Corporate Strategy 2017-2022*. Surrey County Council, 2017.

[https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/125725/item-xx-Annex-1-Corporate-Strategy-2017-22-Annex-1-v3.pdf](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/125725/item-xx-Annex-1-Corporate-Strategy-2017-22-Annex-1-v3.pdf)

42 'Surrey economic overview'. Presentation to a business engagement workshop. Surrey County Council, Feb. 2013.

[https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/27068/Economic-overview-slides.Feb-2013.pdf](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/27068/Economic-overview-slides.Feb-2013.pdf)

### Planning in Surrey

Surrey County Council is responsible for making planning decisions relating to minerals extraction in accordance with the Surrey Minerals Plan, produced by the council. The council also makes decisions relating to the handling or disposal of waste from homes and commercial premises, in accordance with the Surrey Waste Plan, also produced by the council. Together with the Local Plans produced by the 11 district and borough councils, these form the development plan for the county.

Surrey County Council may be asked for comments on large-scale developments and will be involved in planning decisions that require services specific to the people of Surrey, such as schools or fire stations. In this instance the council makes a recommendation on whether permission should be granted, or granted with

certain conditions attached, to the district or borough council that makes the final decision.

### Surrey County Council Investment Strategy

Surrey County Council adopted its Investment Strategy in 2013 to enhance its financial resilience. The strategy is the framework for innovation and investment to support the development of new ideas and approaches. One of the main principles of the Investment Strategy is 'retaining assets where appropriate and undertaking effective property asset management, and if necessary associated investment, to enhance income generation'.<sup>43</sup>

An Investment Board was established in March 2017 as a result of the increased emphasis on developing income streams in the strategy. The function of the Investment Board is to 'approve acquisitions that contribute to the achievement of the agreed investment strategy, to monitor the performance of the portfolio and ensure satisfactory performance and effective risk management'.<sup>44</sup>

### Joint venture with Places for People

The Investment Board evaluated several options to make the most of development opportunities for the council's surplus assets. Following a procurement process a joint venture was established with Places for People, in a 50:50 partnership with the aim of unlocking sites for mixed-use development, using the council's land and buildings and making the most of public sector land while creating assets with income-generating potential.

The joint venture provides an agent and delivery model for economic growth and creates a focus for skills and training development, as well as local employment opportunities. The expectations of the joint venture are:

- *to bring sites forward in a timely manner, responding to market demand and undertake site developments, where appropriate;*
- *to bring forward the development of sites which are considered more difficult to develop at a comparable rate to sites with minimal obstacles to develop;*
- *to support SCC [Surrey County Council] in pursuit of its wider objectives by identifying and helping deliver favourable solutions that balance financial, economic and social returns;*

- *to develop the opportunities provided by Third Parties by increasing capacity, without having an impact on SCC or SCC's strategic objectives;*
- *to drive efficiencies and effectiveness of SCC's asset base;*
- *to secure and demonstrate value for money on all [joint venture] activities'.<sup>45</sup>*

The plan is for the joint venture to develop more than 2,000 homes in its first phase, across 32 council-owned sites. Over the next 15 years, the joint venture could deliver development worth more than £1.5 billion.

### Key lessons

- Surrey County Council has adopted a proactive and ambitious approach to income generation by establishing a joint venture that will make the most of the council's land and buildings assets.
- The decision to establish a joint venture has been made as a result of the council's Investment Strategy, which has set a framework and considered the options available to the council through the Investment Board.
- The joint venture will help to enhance the council's financial resilience over the longer term in line with the strategy's objectives.

### Notes

43 *Investment Board: Summary Annual Report. Financial Year 2016/17.* Surrey County Council, 2016.

[https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/155160/Investment-Board-Summary-Annual-Report-2016-17.pdf](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/155160/Investment-Board-Summary-Annual-Report-2016-17.pdf)

44 'Investment Strategy'. Webpage. Surrey County Council, Feb. 2018. <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/your-council/council-tax-and-finance/investment-strategy>

45 *Joint Venture Development Partner – Contract Award.* Cabinet Report. Surrey County Council, Dec. 2017.

<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s42334/item%2009%20-%20Joint%20Venture%20Final%201%2012%2017.pdf>

# Section 4

## Key lessons and recommendations

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that county councils and county unitary authorities have a significant role to play in providing some of the solutions to the national housing crisis. The recommendations set out in this Section flow directly from the analysis of the survey and case studies and have benefited from discussion and feedback at the stakeholder roundtable.

### 4.1 Leadership

With 62% of county councils and county unitary authorities describing their need for affordable housing in their local areas as ‘severe’, and a further 29% describing it as ‘moderate’, there is a clear need for many more affordable homes in county areas. It is also clear, from the online survey and the case studies, that county councils and county unitary authorities want to be part of solutions to the housing shortage by creating more and better homes.

#### Recommendation 1

**The government should ensure that county councils and county unitary authorities are given a clearly defined role in the forthcoming Affordable Housing Green Paper, providing clear leadership to encourage county councillors and their authorities to think boldly about the role that they can play in helping to solve the housing crisis over the long term.**

### 4.2 Unlocking public sector land

The case studies highlight that county councils and county unitary authorities recognise that more can be

done with their assets, particularly public sector land, by taking a direct stake in the development process and a more holistic approach to land value. In addition, 65% of county councils stated that utilising council-owned land was one of the main benefits of setting up a local authority housing company.

Participants at the stakeholder roundtable identified One Public Estate as a positive way of identifying public sector land and bringing forward land for new homes. One Public Estate ‘is an established national programme delivered in partnership by the Office of Government Property within the Cabinet Office and the Local Government Association. It provides practical and technical support and funding to councils to deliver ambitious property-focused programmes in collaboration with central government and other public sector partners’.<sup>46</sup>

Whether the land is owned by the council or a public sector partner, realising its value is about more than just maximising sales receipts: it is about understanding the potential for long-term income streams, having a stake in the quality of development, and securing wider social and environmental benefits.

Participants at the stakeholder roundtable also highlighted the importance of generating confidence in the robustness of the approach to applying the ‘best consideration’ test for public sector land.

#### Recommendation 2

**The ‘best consideration’ test for public sector land requires review, as outlined in the government’s Housing White Paper, to ensure that county councils are not bound to sell sites on the basis of placing higher short-term receipts ahead of long-term social and economic gains.**

#### Note

<sup>46</sup> ‘About One Public Estate’. Webpage. Local Government Association. <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-planning/one-public-estate/about-one-public-estate>

### 4.3 The multiple benefits of delivering different housing tenures

The case studies and the online survey highlight that county councils and county unitary authorities are exploring a range of tenures, from market sale and rent through to affordable housing (including shared ownership, affordable rent and social rent) and specialist housing such as extra care. Whatever the tenure, if the council is delivering the homes – either on its own or in partnership – it has the potential to ensure that the homes and the public realm are well designed, accessible and sustainable. There is the additional benefit that county councils and county unitary authorities can play a proactive role in the long-term stewardship of areas.

### 4.4 Specialist housing and an ageing population

The online survey revealed that 45% of CCN members that responded are currently delivering specialist housing such as extra care. The Essex County Council and Norfolk County Council case studies both provide innovative examples of county councils providing extra-care facilities. Participants at the roundtable highlighted that by providing specialist housing for older people and people with learning difficulties, councils are able to generate savings against social care budgets, as well as meet the needs of individuals and promote independent living and better health outcomes.

Alongside a strong emphasis on meeting the needs of older people and disabled people, the developments being brought forward by the councils showcased in the case studies are well connected to the local community as part of a holistic approach to regenerating areas, and are being developed to high-quality design and accessibility standards. Given the need to provide well designed, adaptable and accessible housing for an ageing population and those with disabilities, participants at the stakeholder roundtable suggested that all new developments – not just those being delivered by county councils and county unitary authorities – should meet minimum standards on access and inclusion.

**Recommendation 3**  
**The government should introduce new minimum standards for access and inclusion to ensure that all new homes are built to provide for the nation’s ageing population and the needs of people with disabilities.**

### 4.5 Homes for sale and rent

The Essex County Council case study highlights that county authorities can deliver homes for market sale and rent. Homes for market sale generate receipts, and homes for market rent generate revenue streams. These approaches to development can help to meet identified patterns of need that private sector led development alone is unable to achieve. County council led housing schemes are also setting the bar for the private sector in what can be achieved through meeting district and borough Local Plan policy requirements on affordable housing and infrastructure provision.

### 4.6 Affordable housing

County councils are exploring a range of affordable tenures, including shared ownership, affordable rent homes (up to 80% market rent), and social rent homes. All these affordable housing tenures help to meet the need for affordable housing and have the potential to generate revenue streams.

**Recommendation 4**  
**The Housing White Paper states that the government wants ‘to see tenants that local authorities place in new affordable properties offered equivalent terms to those in council housing, including a right to buy their home’. If the right-to-buy rules are going to apply to homes built by local authority housing companies, the government must ensure that they are able to replace them on a one-to-one basis, enabling councils to retain 100% of their right-to-buy receipts, to ensure that their long-term investment programmes are not undermined.**

### 4.7 The power of partnership

Partnerships and joint ventures can be an effective way of sharing skills and capacity, borrowing power, and ultimately risk and rewards.

The Surrey County Council joint venture partnership with Places for People has plans to develop more than 2,000 homes in its first phase, across 32 council-owned sites, delivering development worth more than £1.5 billion over the next 15 years. Similarly, Hertfordshire County Council is also aiming to combine

the best of the private and public sectors, harnessing the property expertise of Morgan Sindall Investments via a joint venture, the first phase of which concentrates on 500 new homes across 12 locations across the county.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**Homes England should recognise and encourage the leading role that county councils and county unitary authorities can play in creating joined-up approaches across sectors to meet housing need. There are benefits for the government in taking on board the experiences of county councils and county unitary authorities in scaling-up housing delivery to meet the country's housing shortfall.**

### **4.8**

#### **Supporting community-led approaches**

As the Northumberland County Council case study illustrates, by combining committed sums from developers with the funding available from the government for community-led housing there is significant potential for county unitary authorities to improve the capacity of local groups and pursue a new way of delivering affordable homes in rural areas.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**The government's Community Housing Fund is welcome, but needs to be continued and expanded to encourage the establishment of more community-led approaches.**

### **4.9**

#### **Skills for delivery**

The Essex County Council case study highlights the benefit of having a dedicated housing growth team; however, this is the exception rather than the norm in county and county unitary authorities. Over two-thirds of councils identified a lack of skills and capacity within the council as a key barrier to setting up a local authority housing company.

Participants at the stakeholder roundtable highlighted the need for councillors, as well as officers, to receive more training, and that this is needed in both district and county councils.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**The government should make capacity funding available to enhance the skills and boost the capacity within county councils and county unitary authorities to enable them to innovate and expand their roles in delivering new housing of all tenures.**

### **4.10**

#### **Strategic planning**

It is clear from the case studies and the online survey that county councils want to work with district councils to deliver the homes that the nation desperately needs – but this requires a more collaborative approach. Participants at the stakeholder roundtable suggested that moving towards strategic planning and co-ordinated infrastructure provision on a county scale will help to overcome the current fragmented approach to housing and planning in rural areas.

The Housing White Paper indicated that a 'Statement of Common Ground' (SoCG) would be introduced, which would require groups of neighbouring authorities to sign up and come together and plan for homes and infrastructure in an area. However, CCN argues that this new mechanism, currently in draft form, does not go far enough in re-writing strategic planning back into the system and joining up Local Plans and infrastructure provision.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**The government should provide a clearly defined role for county councils in the strategic planning process. County councils should be formal signatories in a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG), especially concerning matters relating to housing, infrastructure, economic growth, education, and social care. The government should also indicate in guidance that an SoCG should normally be made over a county geography, giving district councils the capacity to plan for homes over a larger area and the county the ability to plan for infrastructure and service provision for the entire area that it is responsible for.**





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**TCPA, for the County Councils Network**  
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