

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Environment
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ENDORSEMENT OF THE HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL RETROFIT STRATEGY

NON KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report briefs Members on, and seeks Cabinet's endorsement for, the adoption of the Local Area Retrofit Accelerator Strategy (LARA), led by the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, of which the Council is a member.
- 1.2 The report highlights the collaborative development of the Strategy and seeks Cabinet's endorsement of the Council's ongoing commitment to supporting cross-sector engagement towards the development of a long-term, collaborative delivery model for retrofitting within the residential sector.
- 1.3 Cabinet is also asked to endorse the Council's use of its £1.5m Warm Homes Local Grant funding to deliver retrofitting to private properties in the town.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To agree the adoption of the Hertfordshire Local Retrofit Strategy (the Strategy).
- 2.2 To note the receipt of Warm Homes funding by the Council to date and approve its application in accordance with the conditions of the grant.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The residential sector is the second-largest contributor to GHG emissions in Stevenage, accounting for approximately 29% of the borough's total territorial emissions. This includes emissions from domestic space heating, cooking, hot water usage, and electricity consumption within households.
- 3.2 Given this significant impact the Council has prioritised retrofitting initiatives to enhance the energy efficiency of both social and private housing. These efforts align with the Council's broader commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2030.
- 3.3 The Council aims to ensure that all council-owned homes achieve at least an EPC C rating by 2030.
- 3.4 To support this commitment the Council has secured funding through the Warm Homes: Social Housing (WHS) fund (formerly the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund) across multiple waves.
 - Wave 1 (2022): £1.84 million grant, supplemented by £1.6 million from the Council, to retrofit 209 homes.
 - Wave 2 (2023): £2.62 million grant, with an additional £3.97 million from the Council, to improve a further 237 homes.
 - Wave 3 / WHS (2025): £3.85 million with an additional £3.15 million from the Council, to upgrade another 379 homes.
- 3.5 These retrofitting projects have incorporated measures such as external wall insulation, loft and cavity wall insulation, solar panels, ventilation, energy-efficient lighting, and heat pumps, significantly improving the energy efficiency of the housing stock and contributing to the Council's decarbonisation goals.
- 3.6 In addition, in 2025 the Council has secured £1.5 million through the Warm Homes: Local Grant to support retrofitting of private housing across the borough. Eligible households can receive up to £30,000 in fully funded (free) energy-saving home improvements. Following the completion of procurement, the Council is partnering with the National Energy Foundation (NEF) to deliver the grants to qualifying residents. The scheme is subject to national eligibility criteria. The Council's only discretion lies in determining the approach if the scheme is oversubscribed; a first-come, first-served basis is the preliminary proposal in such case. More information on this scheme is available at: [Warm Homes: Local Grant \(gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/warm-homes-local-grant).
- 3.7 The Local Area Retrofit Accelerator (LARA) has been led by the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP), of which the Council is an active member, and facilitated by Dark Matter Labs (regarding

systems change), Collaborate CIC (in terms of community engagement) and the MCS Foundation (on retrofit landscape expertise). The LARA initiative was established to address systemic barriers to large-scale domestic retrofit delivery.

- 3.8 The primary output of the LARA initiative is the Hertfordshire Local Retrofit Strategy (the Strategy), which significantly complements the Council's current actions in retrofitting both social and private housing.
- 3.9 The Strategy constitutes a three-year, structured, and actionable roadmap aimed at accelerating domestic retrofit across Hertfordshire, underpinned by clearly defined priorities and governance arrangements. It has been co-developed through a series of workshops involving local authorities, colleges, landlords, contractors, community groups, and other key stakeholders.
- 3.10 The Strategy offers a coordinated, evidence-based approach to retrofit planning, delivery, funding, and governance. It sets out strategic priorities and actions to guide retrofit delivery across Hertfordshire, including in Stevenage.
- 3.11 Importantly, the Strategy promotes collaboration without imposing financial or legal obligations to the Council at this stage.
- 3.12 The vision of the Strategy is: *“Every home in Hertfordshire is fit for now and for our future”*, whereas its mission has been outlined as: *“Collaborating to retrofit homes in need to enhance our environment and climate resilience, address fuel poverty, improve health, and support local jobs”*.
- 3.13 The anticipated benefits of the Strategy include enhance collaboration, improved access to funding, robust capacity-building and training, more efficient resource use, and better strategic alignment.
- 3.14 The intended outcomes of the Strategy include:
 - Health: Improved mental and physical wellbeing.
 - Equity: Enhancement in people's life outcomes.
 - Affordability: Increased ability to maintain homes at healthy temperatures without financial strain.
 - Energy Efficiency: Reduced energy consumption and emissions from heating, cooling, and powering homes.
 - Productivity: Growth in high-skilled, sustainable employment and local businesses.
 - Resilience: Homes that are prepared for future environmental and climate conditions.
- 3.15 The strategic priorities for the Strategy, reflected in its goals and sub-goals, include:
 - Increasing the uptake of appropriate retrofit measures.
 - Maximising co-benefits of retrofit.
 - Strengthening the local supply chain.
 - Ensuring a coordinated and trusted delivery model.

- 3.16 These priorities have been articulated through four main goals and their corresponding sub-goals, as indicated below:
- Goal 1: Increase uptake and demand for successful delivery of retrofit advice and measures.
 - Goal 2: Realise the co-benefits of retrofit for Hertfordshire.
 - Goal 3: Increase supply chain capacity and quality in Hertfordshire through improved standards and demand.
 - Goal 4: Create a confident and trusted retrofit environment.
- 3.17 A comprehensive list of the goals, sub-goals, and associated actions (including the prioritised ones) is included in the “*Appendix A - Hertfordshire Local Retrofit Strategy*”, where each of the four goals is further detailed alongside their sub-goals and associated actions.
- 3.18 Key prioritised actions in the current version of the Strategy include:
- Launching a general support service providing advice and signposting via web, phone, and email.
 - Piloting a place-based approach to engage citizens in retrofit.
 - Trialling bulk-purchasing schemes for retrofit measures to reduce costs and ensure quality.
 - Supporting social landlords with limited capacity to apply for and deliver grant schemes.
 - Coordinating with Public Health, Social Care, and Integrated Care Systems to build an enabling retrofit environment and create a shared language, work, and understanding.
 - Developing and delivering SME-friendly social impact standards to guide all relevant retrofit projects and procurement.
 - Establishing processes linking supply chains, commissioners, and training providers to ensure training provision matches needs.
 - Establishing a delivery vehicle, governance, and reporting structure for effective Strategy implementation, involving all relevant stakeholders.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 By endorsing the Strategy, the Council will strengthen its ability to deliver effective retrofit initiatives, support local economic growth, and contribute meaningfully to sustainability goals at local, county, and national levels.
- 4.2 The endorsement will also foster the Council's broader engagement to facilitate knowledge-sharing, capacity building, and funding collaboration. Additionally, it will promote internal collaboration to ensure alignment across relevant departments and with strategic priorities.

- 4.3 Endorsing the Strategy will provide a clear mandate for the Council's continued participation in future phases of retrofit action, positioning it as a proactive leader in addressing retrofit challenges.
- 4.4 This endorsement will not hinder the Council's ability to pursue its own retrofit programmes or funding bids. Rather, it complements and adds value to the Council's existing efforts through increased collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and strategic alignment.
- 4.5 From a resourcing perspective, endorsement does not commit the Council to any new financial or legal obligations at this stage, nor does it require significant additional officer time or capacity.
- 4.6 Furthermore, as noted above, any future financial considerations will be brought back to the Council as part of specific project proposals or implementation plans, ensuring transparency and appropriate governance at each stage
- 4.7 Alternative options to endorsement would include:
- Taking no formal position on the Strategy, which may diminish the Council's influence on county-wide priorities and limit access to shared tools, resources, and funding opportunities.
 - Developing a standalone local strategy, which would likely result in duplication of effort and miss the opportunity to benefit from economies of scale, regional collaboration, and collective impact.
- 4.8 Given the Council's active role in HCCSP and its ongoing commitment to retrofit delivery, the recommended course of action presents a low-risk, high-value opportunity to support long-term improvement of energy performance across Stevenage's housing stock.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from the endorsement of the Hertfordshire Local Retrofit Strategy at this stage.
- 5.2 Any future financial considerations will be submitted to the Council as part of specific project funding applications or implementation plans.

Legal Implications

- 5.3 There are no legal implications arising from the endorsement of the Strategy at this stage.

Risk Implications

- 5.4 The endorsement of the Hertfordshire Local Retrofit Strategy presents minimal risk to the Council.
- 5.5 Key risks and corresponding mitigations include:

- Risk of resource strain: The Strategy does not require significant additional officer time or new financial commitments currently, mitigating the risk of overburdening Council staff or budgets.
- Risk of reduced influence: Not endorsing the Strategy could limit the Council's ability to shape retrofit priorities at the county level and reduce access to shared resources, funding, and opportunities.
- Risk of misalignment: Continued internal coordination is necessary to ensure the Strategy aligns with the Council's own retrofit initiatives and strategic priorities, minimising duplication or conflicting efforts.
- Future financial risks: Any potential financial commitments or risks will be subject to separate approvals and brought to the Council for transparent decision-making.

5.6 Overall, the benefits of endorsement outweigh potential risks, and established governance and multi-agency collaboration mechanisms will be in place to manage delivery effectively.

Policy Implications

5.7 The Strategy focuses on ensuring that local policies support retrofit efforts, including coordinated policy development and implementation, as well as considering the integration of retrofit targets into Local Plans to align the with 2050 sustainability targets. While this is not a prioritised action, it remains an area where stakeholders, including the Council, will need to collaborate and ensure compatibility with our own corporate objectives.

Planning Implications

5.8 The Strategy focuses on ensuring that local policies support retrofit efforts, including coordinated policy development and implementation, as well as considering the integration of retrofit targets into Local Plans to align the with 2050 sustainability goals. While this is not a prioritised action, it remains an area where stakeholders, including the Council, will need to collaborate and ensure compatibility with our own corporate objectives.

5.9 No immediate short-term planning implications have been identified at this stage.

Environmental Implications

5.10 The Strategy is expected to generate significant environmental benefits by accelerating the adoption of energy efficiency measures in domestic buildings across the borough. These benefits include:

- Resource conservation, focusing on retrofitting rather than demolition and new buildings.
- Sustainable supply chains, by encouraging the use of local suppliers and SMEs, promoting sustainable sourcing of materials, and reducing transportation-related impacts.
- Improved indoor environmental quality, including air quality and thermal comfort.

- Positive health outcomes.
- Waste reduction.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.11 The Strategy is aligned with broader climate goals and is expected to contribute significantly to the Council's climate change mitigation and adaptation by reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, supporting net-zero targets, enhancing climate resilience, and encouraging behavioural change.

Human Resources Implications

- 5.12 At this stage, the Strategy does not necessitate changes to the Council's human resources. Future phases of implementation may involve officer training to support effective delivery, which could benefit the Council by building internal capacity.

Service Delivery Implications

- 5.13 The endorsement of the Strategy and the implementation of its future refined action plan may have several positive synergies with Council's service delivery, particularly in areas related to housing asset management, and maintenance and repairs of the Council-owned homes. These implications will become clearer once the action plan is finalised.

Other Corporate Implications

- 5.14 The Strategy supports the Council's commitment to delivering more affordable, and good quality homes, as stated in its corporate plan. Additionally, it also aligns with the Council's "Tackling Climate Change" priority, which aims to reduce GHG emissions to net zero by 2030. Retrofit initiatives, such as improving energy efficiency and reducing emissions from housing, are key components in achieving this objective.

Other Implications

- 5.15 By fostering strong cross-sector partnerships, shared governance arrangements, and coordinated delivery models, the Strategy sets a positive precedent for joint working and resource sharing among local authorities.
- 5.16 This collaborative framework can serve as a foundation for more integrated service delivery and policy alignment under the future governance structures introduced by the reform and devolution agenda.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

N/A

APPENDICES

A Appendix A - Hertfordshire Local Retrofit Strategy - Final Text