

INDEPENDENT LIVING STRATEGY 2023-2027

Foreword

The Independent Living Strategy has been created by conducting a full review, rename and update of the Older Persons Housing Strategy (OPHS) 2019 – 2023. The OPHS was a five-year strategy developed as a result of the Ark Report and subsequent working groups views to support the delivery of the modernisation programme and to deliver Stroud District Council's (SDC) vision for its older people's accommodation in the district.

SDC knows that the increasing older population is also becoming more diverse, and more people are living to an incredibly old age which brings a number of challenges in terms of health and support. It also acknowledges that people's aspirations for their lives as they age, are changing too. The services SDC commissions and provides, and the way in which it does it will have to evolve further to meet these changes.

Improving people's lives is a core theme within the Council Plan 2021-2026 and this aspiration resonates strongly with the Independent Living Strategy 2023 – 2027.

This strategy intentions are to maximise the independence, choice and control for older people by providing affordable, accessible, comfortable homes and value for money.

Where this document refers to 'older' and 'getting older' people this includes different generations from age 55 onwards, not because it determines old age but because it is at about this age that people start to think about their future and about retirement.

The Council recognises the demographic shift highlighted in the Ark Report, which, in 2015 anticipates a significant increase in the ageing population over the next 20 years. The report confirmed that 41% of households in Stroud are made up of only older people (aged 55 and over) and that Stroud is likely to see an increase of approximately 78.%of single people of pensionable age retiring in the district. Due to the popularity of the district to people of pensionable age, this increase is likely to impact Stroud more than any other district in Stroud.

This Strategy is formed in a challenging financial climate; however, SDC is committed to delivering its vision of "providing good quality older people's housing which meets a variety of current and future needs – where people want to live. SDC continues to commit to delivering adapted housing and services which are good quality and provide value for money, with an emphasis on affordability to the tenant and the Council. SDC would like the homes it owns to 'enable' older tenants to live as independently as possible with the resources available.

In order to do this, the Council will need to think creatively about how this can be delivered in times of financial constraint, coupled with the current crisis in personal care services and the cost-of-living crisis. This Strategy links strongly with Stroud's Corporate Vision of "making Stroud a better place to live, work and visit for everyone" and the Council Plan 2021 – 2026 one of which is Community Resilience and Wellbeing.

This Strategy sets further context about how it has been established and the strategic objectives which need to be achieved to deliver SDC's vision for Independent Living for older people. The action plan provides a list of robust actions to ensure delivery of this Strategy, in turn achieving SDC's vision.

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1. Our Local Landscape

The Stroud District is a largely rural area covering 175 square miles in the south of Gloucestershire. Much of the eastern half of the district falls into the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which covers just over 50% of the district's total land area. The district has a rich built heritage, including 42 conservation areas in a wide variety of towns and villages of which are unique in character.

Stroud has a population of 121,529 (ONS 2021) with a forecast of 123,170 at the end of 2023. There are currently 47,640 private homes in the district with 5,008 properties in the ownership of the council, 43 shared ownership and 1,640 housing association homes. The population is predicted to grow to 136,000 by 2041. There are currently over 725 people on the waiting list that would be eligible for Independent Living accommodation.

There are currently 23,583 young people (aged 0 – 17), 73,650 working age adults and 28,200 age 65+ adults. The increase of pensionable age is anticipated to rise significantly in the future as a result of rising life expectancy and the demographic impacts of two generations of baby boomers.

The Stroud district benefits from a vibrant community spirit offering a mix of culture and countryside. The towns benefit from a range of independent cafes and shops all set in a picturesque location, which is proving to be a popular choice to live and retire in, particularly with the larger towns of Cheltenham, Gloucester and Cirencester not far away.

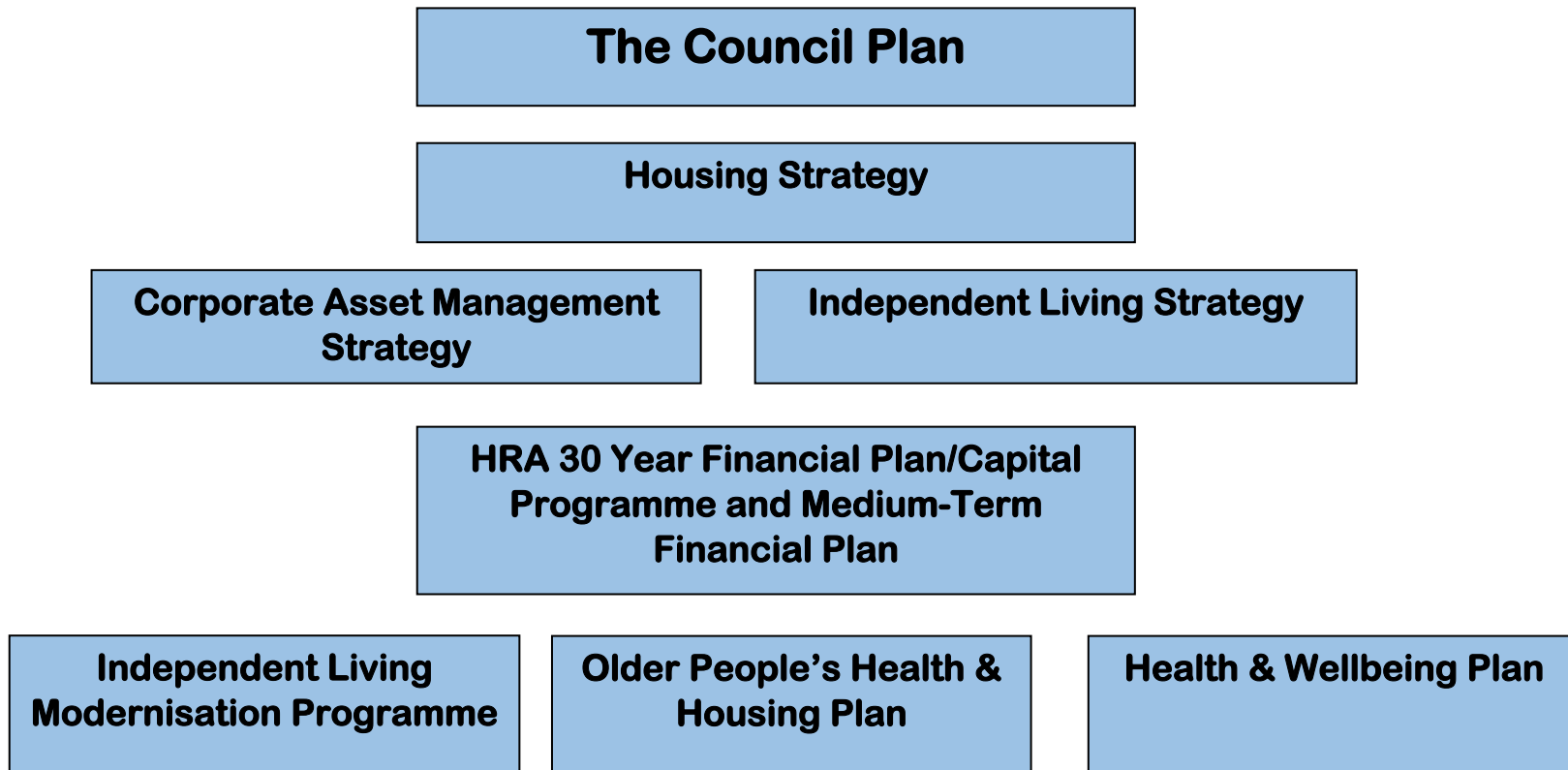
2. The Corporate Context

The Council Plan 2021 – 2026 was published in 2021 (www.stroud.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/corporate-plans-and-policies/council-plan). Concentration on lessons learnt from the global pandemic and how the crisis has affected our finances, organisation, residents, businesses, communities determined the priorities of the Council Plan:

- **Environment and Climate Change** – Protecting our environment and leading the district to carbon neutrality in 2030.
- **Community Resilience and Wellbeing** – Strengthening and supporting our communities so people feel included and connected.
- **Economy, Recovery and Regeneration** – Supporting a thriving and resilient local economy.

The Independent Living Strategy supports The Council Plan and includes key strategic objectives and targets for our Independent Living assets and appropriate general needs stock to ensure they provide good quality accommodation for older people. It also

provides details on our future investment strategy through the Independent Living modernisation programme and the affect this will have on our assets. The diagram below reflects how the Strategy fits in within the wider corporate context:



3. Setting Our Vision

The subsequent need to review and amend the Strategy for older people's accommodation for the next five years was originally founded on the Ark Report (2015) and the Council's commitment to deliver the Independent Living modernisation programme. SDC completed the improvements to the first scheme in 2018 which opened further discussion about which improvements were priorities and what our older people's accommodation should be delivering for current and future tenants. The independent Living modernisation programme is fundamental to improving the health and wellbeing of our older tenants.

The vision was developed jointly with partners and older people themselves. The start point was setting up a Vision and Strategy group with a variety of officers across the council to examine the challenges for older people in the future, particularly during a time of austerity and reduced spend on care and support; with a greater onus on enabling people to live independently in their homes for longer. The focus of this group was solely on current and future SDC tenants, and how some of the future challenges may be overcome. Together a vision was proposed with a number of areas identified which needed further examination and consideration.

In 2022, further surveys were conducted:

- June 2022 – Survey Monkey sent out to all SDC tenants aged 40 – 55 (Appendix 2)
- Tenant Satisfaction Survey (Appendix 3)

The results of the survey have been fed into this Strategy and have also formulated the Action Plan (Appendix 1)

4. Our Vision

The vision proposed by the Vision & Strategy group is:

“To provide good quality older people’ housing which meets a variety of current and future needs – where people want to live”.

In order to continue to meet this vision the Council has set strategic objectives, supported by a robust action plan which can be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.

5. Consultation – What Future Customers Want.

The Tenant Satisfaction Star Survey(Appendix 3) for Independent Living was conducted in late 2022 and was sent out to current residents. A Survey Monkey was also conducted in June 2022 via Facebook and text message; this was sent out to all tenants aged 40+.

- The **Star Survey** was completed by 307 residents which represents 43% of all independent living households that were invited to take part. Over four fifths of residents are satisfied with the overall service, coming against the three-year backdrop of the pandemic, inflation and difficulties in hiring staff. 13% were dissatisfied and 6% were neither satisfied or dissatisfied.
 - ✚ The quality of the home is the main theme of the survey results because how tenants answered this question is the most closely linked to overall satisfaction.
 - ✚ This is an even stronger driver of satisfaction than in the past, reinforced by the fact that the repairs satisfaction appears on this list for the first time.
 - ✚ Communication and resident involvement are the remaining themes, with three of the key drivers on this broad topic, where some scores have improved since the last survey.
- The **Survey Monkey** (Appendix 4) was completed by 57 residents aged between 40 and 55. The survey found that 75% planned to retire in the Stroud District. 49% would consider moving into an Independent Living scheme, whilst 23% would not and 28% were unsure. 50% want to live in a rural parish for peace and quiet, nature being good for well-being and green space whilst 50% want to live in a market town where everything is accessible, close to the shops, better access to community and public transport.
 - ✚ Communal gardens and shared external spaces were an important factor when considering the environment whilst 33% felt a personal space with fencing was important, especially when family visit and to hang washing. Some were not at all concerned about having their own space as they feel shared spaces are important to prevent isolation.

- ✚ Communal space for internal social gathering such as HUBS is high priority for 56% of potential independent living residents.
- ✚ Mobility scooter store and charging points were also high priority for 52% whilst communal laundries was split as 51% categorised this as a very low priority as some would prefer their own laundry facilities.
- ✚ Access to local healthcare facilities, public transport and shops is a high priority for 50% of people; several expressed the wish to have freedom to engage or not to engage with available services.

A summary of recommendations is detailed below:

Continue to work throughout 2023-2026 towards the development of a range of accommodation for older people, rather than 'one size fits all'. This may involve the re-designation of some schemes which could potentially link to a hub scheme to ensure that access to services is not lost.

Improve awareness of our Independent Living options to encourage households to downsize- schemes should become more desirable as a result of the modernisation programme which is improving communal areas and accessibility to these spaces.

Consider conversation of communal areas which are not utilised, to additional accommodation where those communal areas are not suitable to offer genuinely desired facilities for both residents and older people in the vicinity.

Seek areas of improvement of the Council's Corporate Asset Management Strategy to ensure the SDC's older people's schemes and general needs accommodation enables rather than disables – allowing residents to live as independently as possible.

The Independent Living Strategy should seek to enhance partnership working with external agencies to improve support and care provision across the district.

Undertake further visits to other affordable housing providers to examine the range of accommodation and best practice on offer. Carry out focus groups with existing tenants to further examine specific areas with the surveys.

These recommendations have been developed into this Strategy along with the original Task and Finish Group's input into the strategic objectives (<https://www.stroud.gov.uk/media/971200/item-6b-older-persons-strategy-task-and-finish-group-final-report.pdf>)

6. Strategic Objectives

Although the issues that face SDC are not uncommon to other local authorities the vibrancy and variety of the local landscape which includes a mix of rural and urban areas. Alongside the demographic of our population, do present SDC with some unique challenges. A few of these challenges are; social isolation, access to health and support services, transport links, access to retail and leisure facilities and the lack of a range of good quality older people's accommodation.

In response to these challenges, and to achieve the Council's vision, this strategy seeks to deliver six strategic UNIQUE objectives:

U Understand what current and future tenants want from their homes as they age and how this can be achieved.

N New homes should be designed to be dynamic allowing flexibility and adaptability for the future.

I Increase the desirability of our older people's accommodation to encourage downsizing and improve the lives of residents.

Q Quality homes which provide a range of options which 'enable' residents to live independently for longer.

U Understand how affordable our homes and services are for our residents and SDC.

E Engage with agencies and community groups to improve partnership working, reducing isolation and improving health and wellbeing.

The Council recognises that a number of local authorities and housing associations have undertaken similar reviews in recent years. Whilst it is felt that there is good practice that can be replicated, SDC also understands that the district itself is unique and diverse, therefore it may require a different approach to other housing providers.

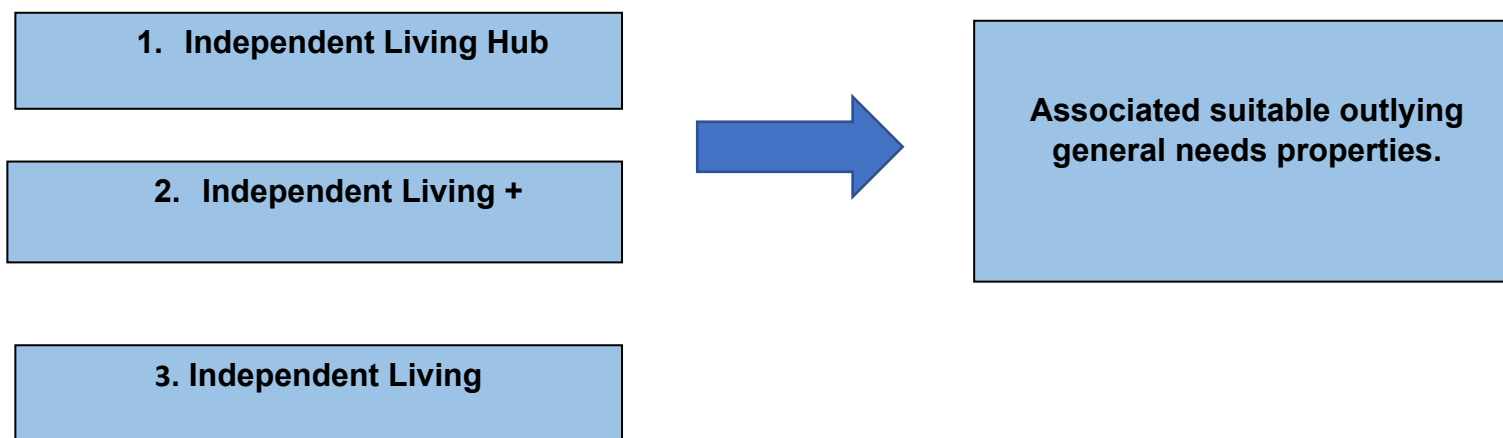
The six strategic objectives will provide the 'unique' approach that Stroud needs to future proof its older people's accommodation, to meet the needs and aspirations of its current and future tenants.

These strategic objectives will shape Stroud's housing stock to provide a range of accommodation which is suitable for a diverse group of older people, whilst remaining affordable in the longer term. The key objectives highlighted should also assist with the crisis in personal care, by enabling tenants to live independently in their homes for as long as possible.

7. Our Range of Accommodation

Currently SDC offers older people's housing in the form of general needs or independent living schemes with a mix of accommodation such as flats, bungalows and houses. Residents in independent living schemes pay an individual service charge which is reflective of the service provided, this was changed from a flat rate service charge across all schemes in 2020.

The current model as set out below, is a result of the consultation undertaken with Stroud residents and the Task and Finish Group's recommendations which has created a range of options for tenants. This provides choice for future customers who may not need all of the services provided at a hub scheme and may not wish to pay for the services they do not need or receive.



Where possible, the schemes have been spread geographically to ensure a range of options in as many areas as possible and to avoid concentration of hubs in specific areas. The key criteria of the accommodation ranges are:

Independent Living Hub

- Communal lounge, which is also used for health clinic, activities, adult education, digital inclusion classes, better balance classes etc., for tenants of the scheme whilst offering this service to outlying properties in the local community.
- 100% provision (or as close as possible) of mobility scooter storage and charging points.
- Level access provided throughout the building and externally.
- Visiting Site Officer
- Enabling Officer available on self-referral for housing related support

Independent Living +

- Communal lounge where tenants can socialise to reduce social isolation.
- Improved provision of scooter storage and charging facilities.
- These schemes may not benefit from level access
- Visiting Site Officer
- Enabling Officer available on self-referral for housing related support

Independent Living

- No communal lounge – existing lounges may be used to create additional accommodation.
- Visiting Site Officer
- Enabling Officer available on self-referral for housing related support, not Tanners Piece.

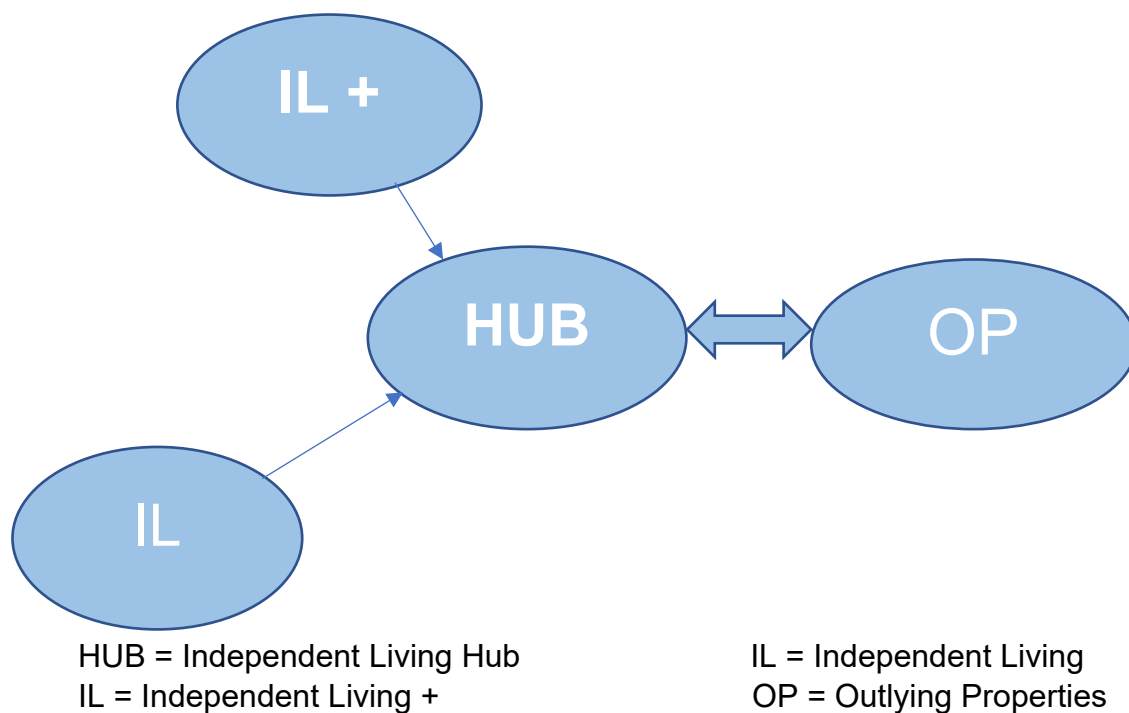
June 2023, there are currently 5 Independent Living HUBS at

- Sherborne House, Stonehouse
- Springfields Court, Cam
- Concord, Nailsworth
- George Pearce House, Minchinhampton
- Grange View, Uplands, Stroud

The sixth hub will be introduced late 2023 at Walter Preston Court in Cashes Green; 2025/26 is when the seventh hub will be introduced at Dryleaze House in Wotton-Under-Edge.

Associated Suitable Outlying General Needs Properties

- General needs properties suitable for older people (e.g., bungalows) are invited and welcomed to any of the independent living schemes identified above. This allows general needs residents to access the enhanced services provided at the independent living schemes, thus helping to support the future viability of social activities at Independent Living schemes.



The diagram shows how the range of accommodation operates:

- Independent living Hub schemes are located around the district with a range of independent living + and independent living schemes also provided in the locality where possible.
- Independent Living Hubs are the centre of the independent living community for their area. Social activities such as health and well-being clinics and recreational events will be organised and held at these schemes and extended to residents in the wider community.
- The residents at independent living + schemes are invited to join in any group activities in the Hub schemes, however they also benefit from a communal lounge at their own schemes allowing them the ability to socialise, building neighbourly relations and networks.
- The Independent Living schemes will not have any communal lounge; however, they are invited to use the Hub or IL+ communal lounges and attend any social activities, this will ensure that residents living at these schemes have the opportunity to live independently but still have the ability to socialise when it suits them.
- Any suitable outlying properties, such as existing general needs bungalows which surround independent living schemes, could also be given the opportunity to attend activities at the Hub extending the community network.

Underpinning Choice

A Comprehensive Information Network

Older people and their families need straightforward explanations about housing and care options in and for later life. At present some information is available but held in different agencies and there is no 'one place' to turn to for information that is needed, often at time of crisis, about major life changing decisions. Older people and their families need to understand issues such as how social care works, what State services and financial support are available, how to go about choosing between accommodation options and whether there are financial options to release equity.

Our intention is to:

- Develop a comprehensive Housing Information Network services that supports people to make the choices suitable for their situation, ensuring the person is at the heart of the decision making.

Greater Involvement in Decision Making

Our intention is:

- Encourage older people in relevant schemes and communities to become champions of the Council's Standards so that older people themselves monitor and challenge the Standards in collaboration with SDC's Resident Involvement groups.

Excellence in the Planning and Delivery of Services

Excellence means delivering the services that are required, from a customer perspective to achieve the outcomes required.

Our intention is:

- Ensure older people in and around our Independent Living sites are receiving the best service from their perspective.
- Recognise that no service can operate in isolation and needs the cooperation and joint working of other departments and agencies.
- Ensure what we do is continually challenged for real improvements.
- Ensure that public money is put to best use for the residents of the district.

Monitoring and Review

Monitoring of the Action Plan

This action plan (Appendix 1) will provide a robust method of monitoring and delivery of the strategic objectives to achieve the Council's vision for its Independent Living Strategy.

The action plan will be monitored on a bi-monthly basis by the Service Delivery Manager and Head of Housing Services, with progress made being reported on an annual basis to Housing Committee.

Review of the Strategy and Action Plan

The strategy and the action plan should be reviewed fully by the Head of Housing Services by April 2025, with any changes to the strategy reported to Housing Committee.

