

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING SERVICES

KEY ISSUES – STRATEGIC AND COMMUNITY HOUSING SERVICES

Key functions of Strategic and Community Housing Services

- To develop and implement an overarching housing strategy, together with a range of sub strategies including those relating to homelessness, affordable warmth, private sector housing, rough sleeping and older people.
- To provide a robust ALMO client function that ensures that Homes for Haringey manages and maintains the Council's housing stock to the required standards, and delivers Haringey's decent homes programme within budget and on time.
- To develop and implement an affordable housing programme, in partnership with registered providers, to provide affordable homes for rent and purchase.
- To improve and enforce standards in private sector housing, including houses in multiple occupation, empty homes and private rented accommodation.
- To provide expert housing advice, and work with private sector landlords and other housing providers, in order to prevent homelessness, sustain tenancies and provide a range of viable housing options.
- To manage and maintain a housing register, assess the housing and support needs of housing applicants (including homeless households living in temporary accommodation, and social housing tenants seeking a transfer), operate the borough's choice based lettings scheme, and allocate social rented housing.
- To procure and manage a stock of temporary accommodation, and discharge the Council's duties in accordance with the homelessness legislation.
- To assist the co-ordination and delivery of advice and support services for survivors of domestic violence and vulnerable people in housing need.

Principal objectives of Strategic and Community Housing Services

- To prevent homelessness
- To reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation
- To make best use of Haringey's social housing stock.
- To maximise the development of affordable housing.
- To improve the quality of private housing.
- To ensure the supply of private rented housing to meet demand.
- To ensure the effective and efficient management of the Council's housing stock.
- To support the Council's strategic agenda
- To achieve continuous service improvement

Recent developments and events

- The new staffing structure, implemented last year, has helped improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Strategic and Community Housing Services by defining roles and responsibilities, re-aligning teams and services, improving communication and joint working, encouraging partnership working and actively involving service users in planning, shaping and monitoring services.
- Excellent joint working with a wide range of partners and stakeholders has enabled good progress to be made in relation to the Homelessness Strategy 2008-11 which is due to be reviewed in October 2010. Work is about to start on a new, 5 year Homelessness Strategy that will be published in Autumn 2011.
- During 2009/10, the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation was reduced by 1,001 (22%) and, by the end of July 2010, the number had reduced to 3,425. An Emergency Accommodation Reduction Project has helped reduce the number of households living in expensive, nightly charged accommodation by 846 (51%) from 1,650 to its current figure of 804.
- Excellent progress continues to be made in relation to the delivery of Haringey's decent homes programme. By the end of March 2010 (the second year of the five year programme), 2,201 council homes had been made decent and the level of non-decency had reduced from 42% at the start of the programme to 27.5%. During 2010/11, another 1,806 council homes (including 481 units of sheltered housing) will be made decent.
- During 2009/10, the Council's targeted approach to tackling under-occupation and overcrowding increased the number of successful moves. As a result of this fresh options-based approach, 70 under-occupiers and 14 overcrowded tenants were helped to move into more suitable accommodation.
- In July 2010, Cabinet approved a Move-On Strategy and Rough Sleepers Strategy. Consultation on the Older People's Housing Strategy is due to start in September 2010 and work continues on the Overcrowding and Under Occupation Strategy, which will help us to make best use of existing social housing stock.
- During the past year, the Council and its partners have been developing a three year Borough Investment Plan to support its 'Single Conversation' with the Homes and Communities Agency. This Investment Plan confirms the Council's priorities in relation to investment and regeneration, and identifies the funding gaps that need to be filled if the schemes are to proceed.
- In 2009/10, the Secretary of State gave the go-ahead for the Council to obtain Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) in relation to 4 empty homes, and the Courts approved the Council's enforced sale of another 5 empty homes due to the owners' non-payment of council tax and other debts.
- The Council is currently consulting on a new draft Housing Allocations Policy that proposes a fresh approach to the way in which applications for social housing are administered and prioritised. Based on housing needs bands (rather than housing points), the draft policy will make it easier for applicants to assess their housing prospects and make better, more informed decisions in relation to their options.

Audit Commission Inspection

In May 2010, the Audit Commission carried out a 7-day inspection of Strategic and Community Housing Services' **allocations, lettings and homelessness services**.

The judgement of the Inspection Team was that Haringey is "providing a 'fair', one-star service that has excellent prospects for improvement".

In its report (published on 12 August 2010), the Audit Commission has acknowledged the significant progress that Strategic & Community Housing Services has made since the last inspection in October 2007, especially in relation to customer involvement, multi agency working, its support for vulnerable adults and its success at preventing homelessness and making use of the private rented sector.

Strategic & Community Housing Services was considered to have excellent prospects for improvement because the Inspectors found that there was a strong track record of improvement over recent years, appropriate plans and strategies are in place, performance monitoring and reporting is generally robust, and there has been strong leadership of the inspected services which has supported improvement.

The Inspectors confirmed weaknesses that we were aware of and were already being addressed through our strategies, improvement plans and the new Housing Allocations Policy.

Key issues and challenges for 2010/2011

For the foreseeable future, the severe constraints on public expenditure will continue to have a very serious impact on housing need and the delivery of housing services.

- A new housing subsidy system, introduced in April 2010, has reduced by £3million per annum the amount of money the Council can claim towards the cost of providing homeless households with temporary accommodation. Action is being taken to plug the funding gap by reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation, re-negotiating the rents paid to housing suppliers and cutting the void turnaround times for leased accommodation.
- Formal consultation is taking place on the first phase of the re-shaping and 'downsizing' of Strategic & Community Housing Services. These changes are needed in order to meet budget savings targets and capitalise on the reduction in workload resulting from the sharp fall in the Council's use of temporary accommodation. The budget pressures have been exacerbated by reductions in the Area Based Grant and in funding from the North London Sub Region.
- The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has seen its 2010/11 budget reduced by £450m (approximately 10%). Further reductions, affecting the period 2011-14, are likely to be announced following the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010. Haringey may lose out if there are any reductions to the Decent Homes Programme and/or the National Affordable Housing Programme.
- In order to increase investment at a local level, the Council is currently exploring the feasibility and merits of other options that will provide the required funding that will provide new homes and mixed developments.

- In the Emergency Budget of 22 June 2010, the Coalition Government proposed a series of measures designed to reduce expenditure on Housing Benefit. With effect from April 2011, Local Housing Allowance rates will be ‘capped’ and, from October 2011, changes will be made to the way in which the Local Housing Allowance rates are calculated. Furthermore, from April 2014, households that have been in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance for at least 12 months will have their Housing Benefit payments reduced by 10%.
- If the changes announced in the Emergency Budget are implemented, they will have a very significant impact on Haringey. Not only will they lead to increased homelessness, but they will also severely limit the Council’s ability to secure good quality private rented accommodation for households in need, especially larger families. There will also be unprecedented ‘outward migration’ from the Inner London boroughs, where housing costs are higher and most properties exceed the ‘cap’. This will place additional pressure on those Outer London boroughs (including Haringey) where housing costs are lower. As well as putting an additional strain on the local housing market, it will also increase the cost of housing-related support, safeguarding and health and social care in the borough.
- Ongoing work is being undertaken to assess the options for the three sheltered housing schemes that have been excluded from the decent homes programme. Subject to the results of further consultation and the necessary funding being identified and available, Cabinet will be asked to approve the redevelopment of Protheroe House as an Extra Care Scheme. Further information is being gathered in relation to Larkspur Close, and the options available for Stokley Court will be explored in the context of the Older People’s Housing Strategy. All decisions on the three schemes will need to be made by Cabinet.
- Following consultation, the draft Housing Allocations Policy will be considered by the Cabinet on 16 November 2010. Its implementation will afford the opportunity to review the number of households on the housing register and introduce a rolling annual review. This will ensure that the register is more manageable and that applicants’ circumstances are kept up-to-date as and when their circumstances change.
- The Council is working closely with partners to ensure delivery of the Rough Sleepers Strategy. Co-ordinated working is taking place with the Police, DWP, the UK Borders Agency, voluntary sector agencies and local churches to address the issue of A10 nationals affected by the recession and sleeping rough.
- As well as announcing changes to funding, the Coalition Government has made a number of announcements of possible changes to housing policy. These have included a potential review of a ‘tenancy for life’ for social housing tenants which would mean that tenancies would be granted for a fixed period of time and reviewed to make sure that the tenant still requires the size of property in which they are living. The introduction of an incentive to encourage councils to build new homes (which is equivalent to the cost of the Council Tax for the property for a number of years) has also been announced.