

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

- Excellent joint working with a wide range of partners and stakeholders has enabled good progress to be made in relation to the multi agency Homelessness Strategy 2008-11 which was again reviewed at an annual stakeholder event in November 2010. Work has already started on a new, 5 year Homelessness Strategy that will be published in Autumn 2011.
- During 2010/11, the Council has continued to reduce its use of temporary accommodation, but at a much slower rate than during the previous two years. Between April and December 2010, the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation was reduced by 251 (7%) to 3,296. Despite the continued success of the Housing Advice & Options Team in preventing homelessness, increased rents and reduced supply have made it more difficult for the Council to discharge its homelessness duty in the private rented sector.
- Excellent progress continues to be made in relation to the delivery of Haringey's decent homes programme, with another 1,806 tenanted homes (including 481 units of sheltered housing) due to be made decent in 2010/11. It is anticipated that, by the end of March 2011 (the third year of the five year programme), more than 5,500 homes will have been made decent since the start of the programme.
- Sustained improvement has been made to void turnaround times in relation to the Council's housing stock. The average time taken to repair and re-let routine voids has reduced during each of the last 4 months from 46.13 days in August 2010 to 31.94 days in November 2010. In November 2010, the average void turnaround time for routine voids was 23.68 days for general needs properties and 52.87 days for supported housing. Managers within the Council and Homes for Haringey have visited other London boroughs to identify good practice and are considering how best to improve accountability for the end-to-end voids process.
- Following 3 months' consultation, the Cabinet approved a new Housing Allocations Policy (based on Housing Needs Bands) in November 2010 and this will come into effect on 31 January 2011. Applicants awarded the highest priority (those in Bands A & B) have already been advised of the changes; the other applicants are being invited to re-register, on-line, by the end of March 2011. The introduction of on-line registration and a rolling annual review of applications, together with better management of customer expectations, will substantially reduce the size of the Housing Register and the cost of its administration.
- The Council's targeted approach to tackling under-occupation and overcrowding has continued to provide positive outcomes for tenants. Between April and December 2010, a total of 48 under-occupiers and 26 overcrowded tenants were helped to move into more suitable accommodation. Pro rata, we have provided settled housing solutions for the same number of under-occupiers and twice as many overcrowded tenants this year as we did in 2009/10.
- Our Housing Improvement Team (Private Sector) has continued to achieve excellent outcomes in relation to empty homes, bringing problematic properties back into use through robust and targeted enforcement. Since April 2010, the Council has taken possession of 5 empty properties (using the enforced sale process to recover money that is owing in relation to the non-payment of council tax and other debts) and, of these, 4 have already been sold at auction. Although the Cabinet authorised compulsory purchase action for 6 other properties in April 2010, the threat of enforcement action has proved sufficient to persuade the owners of 5 of these properties to bring the properties back into use.

- In December 2010, the Cabinet approved the closure of Protheroe House (one of its sheltered housing schemes) with a view to it being redeveloped as an extra care supported housing scheme in line with Haringey's new Older People's Housing Strategy. Decisions on the future of two other sheltered housing schemes (Larkspur Close and Stokley Court) will be made in Spring 2011.
- Between June and December 2010, Managers completed the first phase of the 'downsizing' and re-shaping of Strategic & Community Housing Services. Resulting in a reduction of 18 posts, the first phase capitalised on the impact that the Council's reduced use of temporary accommodation has had on the workload of the Temporary Accommodation, Income Recovery and Finance teams.
- At the instigation of David Lammy MP, I met with the Minister for Housing and Local Government (the Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP) and some of the Council's service users at Broadwater Farm on 7 December 2010, to discuss the borough's homelessness problems and the impact that the Government's welfare reforms (especially those relating to Local Housing Allowance and Universal Credit) will have on Haringey, its residents and the Council's ability to prevent homelessness and discharge its homelessness duty in the private rented sector.
- During the meeting with the Minister, there was a very frank exchange of views and he accepted the Council's argument that, unless Housing Benefit entitlement is wholly disregarded when the £500 weekly 'cap' is applied to Universal Credit, large families who are living in temporary accommodation or the private rented sector will be left destitute. At the end of the meeting, I described the difference that decent homes funding has made and why it is essential that the Government provides Haringey with the money it needs to complete its 5 year programme.
- Concerned by the prospect of unprecedented outward migration' from Central London (caused by the Government's decision to 'cap' Local Housing Allowance rates with effect from April 2011), we have written to 18 London boroughs, requesting details of the out-of-borough temporary accommodation (hostels, nightly-charged emergency accommodation and private sector leasing) they are currently using in Haringey. As only half of the local authorities have provided the information to date, I am willing to use the Freedom of Information Act, to obtain this information, if required. .
- I remain of the view that a Statutory Instrument is required to prohibit local housing authorities from placing very vulnerable homeless households (including those that include someone who has a severe physical disability or learning disability, or a child who is the subject of a child protection plan) in out-of-borough temporary accommodation, except in an emergency and then for only 6 weeks.

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.

During their inspection, 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. An action plan is now being implemented.

Key issues and challenges for 2011/2012

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.

Welfare reform and the proposed changes to the funding arrangements in relation to the Housing Revenue Account, decent homes and the provision of new affordable housing will present Haringey with considerable challenges in the year ahead.

- Despite Officers' success in re-negotiating the rents paid to housing suppliers and cutting the void turnaround times for leased accommodation, the amount of money that the Council is able to claim towards the cost of providing homeless households with temporary accommodation is still not sufficient to cover the full cost of procuring and managing the temporary accommodation.
- The Government's recent decision to calculate the Local Housing Allowance on the basis of the 30th percentile of rents from April 2011 – six months earlier than originally proposed – will severely limit the Council's ability to secure good quality private rented accommodation, especially for families, as a means of preventing homelessness and discharging the Council's homelessness duty.
- In February 2011, Haringey will learn how much funding it will receive for its decent homes programme. This follows the Government's announcement (following the Comprehensive Spending Review) that substantially less money will be available for decent homes investment during the period 2011-15 and that all council landlords (and not just those landlords that have been awarded 2 stars by the Audit Commission) will be permitted to apply for a share of the funding.
- An announcement will shortly be made on the Government's reform of the Housing Revenue Account and the details of the debt settlement that is required to enable councils to achieve a sustainable, self-financing business plan. When we know the outcome of this and our application for decent homes funding, we will need to consider how best to address the future investment needs of the Council's housing stock, especially those homes situated outside of the borough.
- The Government is currently consulting on the way in which social rented housing is allocated and the length and type of tenancy that will be offered to new tenants in the future. For Haringey, it is the Affordable Rent Option (which allows social landlords to charge rents equivalent to 80% of the market rent in order to finance the building of new homes) that will have a bigger impact, especially if the Homes and Communities Agency allows or encourages landlords to increase the rents charged for existing social rented housing when it is re-let.
- We are proposing to introduce a discretionary licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) that will come into effect in 2011. This is expected to be self-financing (from the licensing fees received from landlords) and to provide a catalyst for the improvement of standards in the private rented sector.
- Consultation is continuing with staff on the second phase of the 'downsizing' and re-shaping of Strategic & Community Housing Services. Further reductions in the staffing establishment will be achieved by rationalising teams and services, and by placing increased emphasis on strategic commissioning.