

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

- Work has started on the production of Haringey's new multi agency Homelessness Strategy, due for publication later this year. Building on the achievements of the past three years, the new Strategy will again focus on preventing homelessness (with an emphasis on targeted interventions, planned move-on and tenancy sustainment), tackling the causes of homelessness, and improving the housing options and life chances of people who are homeless.
- During 2010/11, the Council reduced by 253 (from 3,547 to 3,294) the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation. Unfortunately, the rate of reduction slowed considerably during the year and, since November 2010, the number of households has levelled off at between 3,294 and 3,305.
- Increased rents and reduced supply have made it increasingly difficult for the Council to discharge its homelessness duty in the private rented sector. During 2010/11, Haringey placed a total of 500 households in the private rented sector; this was only half of the number of placements made during 2009/10.
- Despite widespread concerns about its likely impact on homelessness and the 'outward migration' of low income households from Central London, the Government implemented its plans to base the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) on the 30th percentile of local rents – and to 'cap' weekly LHA rates at £250 for one-bedroom homes, £290 for 2-bedroom homes, £340 for 3-bedroom homes and £400 for homes with at least 4 bedrooms – for new claims from 1 April 2011.
- Although existing tenants affected by the LHA 'caps' will receive time-limited transitional protection, most will be expected to move to alternative, less expensive private rented accommodation (in the Outer London boroughs or outside of London) when their transitional protection comes to an end in 2012.
- In February 2011, the Government announced the outcome of local authority bids for funding under its Decent Homes Backlog Funding Programme 2011-15. Although Haringey fared better than many other local authorities, its award of £69.9m over the next 4 years is £28.7m less than what we were expecting to receive to fund the remaining 3 years of our Decent Homes programme. Furthermore, almost £30m of the funding – due in the third and fourth years of the programme – is only an 'indicative allocation' and not guaranteed.
- It remains the longer term aspiration of the Council and Homes for Haringey to complete the Decent Homes programme. However, in order to achieve this, we will need to adopt an 'elemental' approach to Decent Homes (which prioritises works that are essential to ensure that homes are safe, warm and watertight, but leaves only very limited scope for new bathrooms and kitchens) and to consider more innovative and flexible funding solutions that enable us to deal effectively with homes and estates that require very high levels of investment.
- Sustained improvement has been made to void turnaround times in relation to the Council's housing stock and, during 2010/11, the average time taken to repair and re-let routine voids was 35½ days. Although this was a lot higher than the target of 25 days, it was 9 days less than the average for 2009/10 and 8 days less than the average for 2008/09. During the last 7 months of 2010/11, the monthly average repair and re-let times for General Needs homes were always less than 30 days and the average was less than 25 days in 4 of the 7 months,.

- Haringey's new Housing Allocations Policy (based on Housing Needs Bands) came into effect on 1 March 2011. Applicants awarded the highest priority were put into Bands A and B and all other applicants were informed of their 'provisional' banding in Bands C, D or E. Approximately 2,000 of the letters sent to lower banded applicants were either returned (because the applicants were not known at that address) or resulted in the applicant cancelling their application.
- New housing applicants will be able to register on-line from the end of May 2011. All applicants in Bands C, D and E will be required to re-register, on-line, from the beginning of June 2011. The introduction of on-line registration and a rolling annual review of applications, together with better management of customer expectations, is expected to substantially reduce the size of Haringey's Housing Register and the cost of its administration.
- The new Housing Allocations Policy awards extra priority to council and housing association tenants who are willing to give up their family homes and transfer to accommodation with fewer bedrooms. It will support the Council's efforts to tackle under-occupation and overcrowding which, in 2010/11, enabled 63 under-occupiers and 33 overcrowded tenants to move into more suitable homes.
- The 63 under-occupation moves successfully 'freed up' 5 four-bedroom homes, 30 three-bedroom homes and 28 two-bedroom homes. Of the 12 tenants who moved into sheltered housing, 10 moved into sheltered housing in Haringey.
- Of the 33 overcrowded tenants assisted by the Council in 2010/11, 23 required a four-bedroom home, 3 required a 5-bedroom home and 1 required a six-bedroom home. Two thirds of these tenants (including 18 requiring a four-bedroom home) were helped to obtain suitable, good quality private rented accommodation.
- In February 2011, the Homes & Communities Agency provided London & Quadrant Housing Trust with almost £4m to fund the conversion of 48 temporary homes in Haringey (occupied by homeless families nominated by the Council) into permanent homes, let on assured tenancies at social rents. This relieved pressure on the Temporary Accommodation budget and was only possible, within the very tight timescales, with the assistance of Council officers.
- Since the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010, the Government and Homes & Communities Agency have spent a considerable amount of time and effort urging local authorities and registered providers to adopt an Affordable Rent Model that has been designed to enable new homes to be developed with only minimal grant subsidy, at rents equivalent to up to 80% of the market rent.
- Officers from Haringey have met regularly with the Homes & Communities Agency and registered providers to discuss the Affordable Rent Model. However, Ministers' reluctance to exclude housing costs from the £500 per week 'cap' on Universal Credit – and to confirm whether or not the Housing Benefit payable for such properties will be paid direct to the registered provider – has prevented any meaningful assessment of the affordability and viability of such development.
- Throughout 2010/11, Officers have worked hard to reduce the cost of temporary accommodation, so as to minimise the Council's financial exposure in relation to the housing subsidy arrangements. Following re-negotiation of rents and leases – and after handing back homes that are especially expensive – the Council has renewed 660 leases and managed to reduce the number of higher cost leased properties, by 418 (85%), to just 70.
- Consultation has now been completed 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.

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, the amount of money that the Council is able to claim towards the cost of providing homeless households with temporary accommodation (TA) is still not sufficient to cover the full cost of procuring and managing the accommodation. The problem is compounded by the fact that, from 1 April 2011, the TA housing subsidy arrangements that have applied to local authorities will also apply to any registered providers providing TA under the homelessness legislation.
- In order to minimise the impact of 'outward migration' from Central London (resulting from the introduction of LHA 'caps' and the difficulties that London boroughs are experiencing in securing reasonably priced temporary accommodation within their own boroughs), Haringey has taken the lead on a joint procurement initiative with Barnet, Enfield and Camden that involves a common pricing policy and set of standards for nightly-charged annexes.
- This common pricing policy will be enforced by a Pan London Agreement (approved by the Leaders of all London boroughs) which prohibits the London boroughs from paying housing suppliers more for out-of-borough TA than is being offered by the boroughs in which the TA is situated..
- The Government's 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. It will also result in a substantial increase in the number of private tenants who are at risk of becoming homeless because they are unable to meet their contractual rent payments.
- An announcement will shortly be made on the Government's reform of the Housing Revenue Account (due to be implemented in April 2012) and the details of the debt settlement that is required to enable councils to achieve a sustainable, self-financing business plan. In order to inform the Council's decision making, a 30 year Business Plan will be produced, based on the HRA self financing model and taking into account the results of this year's stock condition surveys.
- In view of the high investment needs of the Council's housing stock, the reduction in the Decent Homes funding and the introduction of the HRA self-financing, Homes for Haringey and the Council will need to appraise the range of available options for the future delivery of sustainable investment in the housing stock. Options that may be explored could include regeneration initiatives, managed disposal and reinvestment, local stock transfer, and increased rents.
- Given our commitment to the regeneration of the borough, it is essential that we adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach to the Affordable Rent Model where its use can assist the regeneration of estates and brownfield sites, reduce the East/West polarisation and enable us to implement the Borough Investment Plan.