

COUNCIL

15th JULY 2013

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	COUNCILLOR GEORGE DAVIES
CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR	NEIGHBOURHOODS, HOUSING AND ENGAGEMENT
CO-ORINDATING CHIEF OFFICER	EMMA DEGG

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relevant to his/her portfolio.

1. CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEES AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING

Following a report to Cabinet on 23 May 2013, 4 Constituency Managers have been internally recruited who will enable Constituency Committees to take a leadership role in influencing and shaping services. They will ensure that citizen engagement and empowerment is transformed and continuously improved. A Neighbourhood Engagement Officer will also be located in each constituency.

Elected Members completed a survey in April 2013 providing feedback on the proposed operating model of neighbourhood arrangements, and have also taken part in consultation workshops in the last few to define how the 4 Constituency Committees will operate and how community representatives will be selected.

A Strategic Director will take responsibility for each constituency area and will provide the senior officer link between the Constituency Committees and the strategic and operational delivery of coterminous services.

£200,000 in total has been allocated to the 4 Constituency Committees, which will develop Constituency Plans and commission activities accordingly.

2. DISCHARGE OF HOMELESSNESS DUTY INTO PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

Cabinet on 13 June 2013 approved a policy to discharge a homeless duty into the Private Rented Sector after consultation with related stakeholders, in line with the provisions of the Localism Act and in response to pressures on the social rented stock in Wirral. Ensuring that the standards of property and management by private landlords is maintained and improved, that conditions are reasonable and landlords are fit and proper people remain key challenges.

The duty must be met with an offer of an assured short-hold tenancy in privately rented accommodation with a minimum fixed period of one year.

3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF BENEFIT REFORMS AND UNDER-OCCUPATION

The Economy & Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee produced a report on the effects of Welfare Reforms on the under-occupation of rented accommodation in Wirral's social and private rented sectors, based on interviews with a wide range of providers, agencies and stakeholders in January 2013. It contains 18 key recommendations for tenants, social housing providers, private landlords, the Council, its services and partner organisations and their clients. While work is already underway across the housing sector to address these implications, Cabinet has asked officers to draw up an Action Plan to address the recommendations and provide on-going monitoring.

4. HOUSING RESEARCH PROJECTS

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

Wirral is in the process of commissioning a new SHMA that will objectively assess the needs for market and affordable housing. The information obtained from the SHMA will be used to enable the Council to update and inform its Housing Strategy, strategic priorities and provide an evidence base for the Core Strategy, which will reset the housing requirement for Wirral to 2030. Consultants should be appointed by July 2013. The SHMA should be fully completed by January 2014.

Private Sector Stock Condition Survey (PSSCS)

A PSSCS is undertaken every five years to help measure the impact of Wirral's housing improvement programs e.g. Warmer Wirral, housing clearance and renewal, aids and adaptations and Wirral Healthy Homes. It will also inform the Housing Strategy and strategic priorities. Wirral PSSCS has been jointly procured with Sefton Council and is being undertaken by David Adamson Partners. The survey is due for completion by August 2013.

5. AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEW PROVISION

322 new affordable homes must be delivered in the Borough in 2013/14, based on actual completions throughout the year where funding to deliver these units has been secured through a range of programmes. Over £29 million of investment will be made by Registered Providers (Housing Associations).

Since January 2013 nine new housing development schemes have started. These include 10 units on the Great Easter Pub site in New Ferry and a further 31 units across two Council owned sites at Esher Housing and Poulton House. 26 affordable new housing units have been completed since April 2013 including 21 units at Town Meadow Lane in Moreton. In May 2013 a development of 21 new two bed apartments was opened in Bidston Road, Claughton by Regenda Housing Association.

6. COSYHOMES FREE INSULATION SCHEME

In operation 2011-2013, a total of 25,772 measures have been installed into houses as part of the scheme, resulting in a CO2 saving of 356, 341 tonnes.

7. HANDYPERSON SCHEME

Council agreed to reduce the size of the Handyperson Team as a budget saving. Two members of the team affected have since set up their own gardening service with advice and support from officers and through the gifting of equipment and the sale of vehicles to them by the Council.