

WIRRAL COUNCIL

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY – 11 JUNE 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION

REGENERATION DEPARTMENT YEAR END REPORT 2006/2007

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is for Members to note the progress made by the Housing Division of the Regeneration Department over the last year and key objectives and resources implications for the future.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Departmental Year End Report 2006/07 (Appendix 1) details our performance over the last year.

3.0 SPECIFIC IMPLICATIONS FOR HOUSING

3.1 The following summary highlights those areas of the Departmental Plan that will be of principal relevance to members of the Housing and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee, namely the work undertaken by the Housing Strategy, HMRI, Supported Housing and Rehousing Services Sections.

3.2 *What were the key objectives we achieved in the last year?*

Housing Strategy

3.2.1 In February 2007 the Strategic Housing Service underwent an inspection by the Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate which included most of the wide range of services provided by the Housing Division. The result of the inspection was announced on 17th May 2007 and Wirral was scored as having a '2 star' service with 'promising prospects' for improvement.

3.2.2 All NRF and HMRI funded energy efficiency initiatives maximised their spend allocations. Through the Cosy Homes Initiative alone 700 households were assisted with insulation measures during 2006/07 and an average Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating of 58.24 for all dwellings in Wirral has been achieved.

3.2.3 Through our investment programme in HMRI and Neighbourhood Renewal the percentage of all social housing which meets the decent homes standard within the priority neighbourhoods has increased from 58.9% in 2005/06 to 68.6% at the end of 2006/07, an increase of 9.7%. Decency within the private sector continues to be a challenge and whilst the increase for decency standards across all tenures did not reach the anticipated target of 62% progress is still being made with the 2006/07 final figure standing at 61.2%.

3.2.4 We appointed RSM Robson Rhodes to assist the Council in a review of homelessness services provided in Wirral. The review which commenced in March is well underway with one to one interviews and focus groups completed with key external partners including advice agencies, a range of support and accommodation providers and the

PCT. Questionnaires are currently being completed by service users and providers of local services to complement the work already undertaken.

3.2.5 During 2006/07 159 units of affordable housing have been provided to meet local need. This has included 27 units for Homebuy and 132 units for rent. This includes 60 units of supported accommodation to respond to vulnerable clients with a range of special needs including learning disabilities, autism and young mothers with babies. In 2006/07 Wirral's second Extra Care scheme was completed which offers accommodation and support services to frail older people.

HMRI/Private Sector Housing Renewal

3.2.6 In September 2006 the HMRI service was inspected by the Audit Commission as part of the NewHeartlands Performance Review process. The inspection focused on the Council's delivery of HMRI in Tranmere and concluded that the Council is being successful in implementing housing market renewal and is achieving demonstrable outcomes. The Council's successful delivery of HMRI and private sector housing renewal generally, was also reflected in the Strategic Housing Inspection referred to in paragraph 3.2.1 of this report.

3.2.7 The HMRI Programme for 2006/07 exceeded its financial targets and achieved significant outputs. The £9.2 million HMRI funding used in 2006/07 levered in an additional £8.8 million public sector funding, well in excess of the £6.5 million target. The Programme achieved 139 acquisitions (target 124), 139 demolitions (target 151), 58 Decent Homes improvements (target 59) and 70 new-build homes (target 75).

3.2.8 The wider HMRI and private sector housing renewal service continued to perform well. The transition from assessing housing standards and enforcement priorities under the Fitness Standard to the new Housing Health & Safety Rating System was successful although it is proving to be an additional time burden for staff. The service also introduced its HMO Licensing scheme, recruited an Empty Property Team and the Landlord Accreditation Scheme continued to prosper with 49 new landlords and 102 new properties joining the scheme.

Supported and Special Needs Housing

3.2.9 Cabinet approved the merger of the following services to form the Supported and Special Needs Housing Section:

- Supporting People
- Black Minority and Ethnic (BME) Support Service
- Home Adaptations Team
- Wirral Home Improvement Agency (WHIA)
- Handyperson Service (HPS)

3.2.10 This allows the Section to provide a seamless, cohesive service to vulnerable residents of Wirral.

3.2.11 Supporting People continues to fund, contract, monitor and review 244 supported housing services with an annual budget of £10.1m. This provides services to approximately 5,000 clients.

- 3.2.12 Consultation with partners, providers and service users has identified further areas for development and good practice, which are now forming a number of pilot services, the findings of which will inform future service commissioning.
- 3.2.13 The implementation of the BME Support Service has allowed the provision of floating support to Black, Minority and Ethnic communities in Wirral. The following clients have been helped directly or sign-posted to access services:
- 170 clients have accessed the service
 - 126 clients have been supported directly
 - 44 clients have been sign-posted to other services
 - 426 requests for assistance have been responded to by the BME team to date
- 3.2.14 The Wirral Home Improvement Agency/Handy Person Service has received over 2300 enquires over the last 12 months; 2000 clients have had minor works carried out to enable them to live safe, secure and independent lives within their own homes.
- 3.2.15 Home Adaptations Team (HAT) receive an annual budget of £1.2 million to enable major adaptations to be carried out via a disabled facilities grant (DFG). The service also has a Service Level Agreement with Wirral Partnership Homes (WPH) to carry out adaptations on behalf of their tenants. 280 DFGs were carried out in 2006/07 and 183 adaptations for WPH. HAT also manages minor adaptations for Social Services and over 1500 minor adaptations were carried out last year.

Rehousing Services

- 3.2.16 Almost 1200 lettings were carried out through Wirralhomes, the Choice Based Lettings system operated by the Council on behalf of 13 Registered Social Landlords (Hornby Housing Association joined the scheme during the year. A review of the Wirralhomes database of applicants took place from October 2006 to January 2007 during which process the number of applicants registered decreased from 17,600 to 11,400. The system advertised an average of 24 properties per week. Each property received on average 38 expressions of interest, thus the service deals with approximately 900 expressions of interest per week.
- 3.2.17 The groups in which properties are advertised was reduced from 3 to 2 in July 2006 to reduce confusion and this has been popular. A comprehensive customer survey was carried out in January 2007 and the findings will be used to inform future service developments
- 3.2.18 The Housing Advisors based at the Conway Centre, providing advice to potentially homeless households were able to prevent over 900 households from becoming homeless during the year. In cases where homelessness could not be prevented, Homeless Officers accepted a full statutory duty for 476 households which is a 9% decrease on the previous year; accommodation for 264 of these has been arranged through offers from RSLs.
- 3.2.19 The Homelessness Section has equipped 2 further properties for use by homeless families as temporary accommodation to avoid the use of Bed and Breakfast.
- 3.2.20 The income available through Housing Benefit for households in temporary accommodation has been increased to enable a greater level of support to be provided to homeless households. In addition the Section has agreed additional temporary funding through Supporting People to increase homelessness prevention work.

3.2.21 The Drug and Alcohol Action Team for the Birkenhead Town Centre Outreach project has continued to work “to establish the reasons for rough sleeping in Birkenhead and the barriers to housing for this client group”.

3.3 ***What will we be the key objectives we will be focusing on over the next quarter?***

Housing Strategy

3.3.1 Following the Audit Commission Housing Inspection the Housing Division will over the next quarter prepare a Service Improvement Plan to respond to the recommendations identified by the Inspectors. This needs to be completed by 17 July. The first element of this will be to develop consistent Service Delivery Standards for all teams within the Division, which will involve resident, service user and stakeholder involvement in setting and determining those standards to be adopted.

3.3.2 During the next quarter the Homelessness Review will engage with service users and providers of local services through questionnaires. This will enable them to contribute to the assessment and evaluation of the current and future extent of homelessness in Wirral, the effectiveness of homelessness services and their impact on homeless prevention and reduction. A draft report is expected to be produced in the following quarter which will be distributed to key stakeholders for consultation and feedback.

3.3.3 The results of the Housing Market and Needs Assessment will be finalised with a plan agreed for taking forward the results of the assessment. Emerging findings are showing a significant demand for affordable housing for rent and homebuy (formerly known as shared ownership) across the whole of the borough. This need will have to be balanced with the available land supply in Wirral and resources of the Council and its partners. The results may also require the review of existing policies influencing new developments. However, we will continue to work with our partners to ensure the housing needs of local residents are met. The redevelopment of the YMCA building offering 56 units of support and accommodation is due to complete in June 2007 and Wirral's third Extra Care scheme for older people with cognitive problems is due to be completed by Summer 2007.

3.3.4 In response to legislative requirements set out in the Housing Act 2004, Wirral along with Sefton, Knowsley and Liverpool are to embark on a sub regional piece of work into the accommodation and needs assessment for Gypsies and Travellers. Information from this study will enable a local and sub regional approach to be agreed in the future.

HMRI/Private Sector Housing Renewal

3.3.5 Following the recent Audit Commission inspections the service will be focusing on developing its Service Improvement Plan including standardising service standards. It will also focus upon producing a Value For Money statement and will implement new Asset Management arrangements.

3.3.6 Finalising the Strategic Partnering Agreements and Development Agreements with Lovell to bring forward the building of new homes in Tranmere and Rock Ferry is the service's main short-term priority.

3.3.7 The service will also be completing and publishing an updated Private Sector Housing Strategy setting out its short, medium and long-term priorities for the sector.

3.3.8 In terms of delivery, the level of demolition will increase in Rock Ferry and Tranmere, the tendering process for the third Phase of the Triangles Group Repair scheme will take place and the Neighbourhood Options Appraisals being carried out in North Birkenhead will continue towards conclusion. This will inform the next HMRI bid, which will be drafted out over the next quarter.

Supported and Special Needs Housing

3.3.9 In partnership with service providers and statutory agencies a number of pilot supported housing services are to be developed. These include:

- Floating support service for residents with HIV/Aids
- Resettlement services for clients with Mental Health and Learning Disabilities
- Homelessness Services
 - Bond Scheme Support Officer
 - Private Sector Homelessness Prevention Officer
 - Home Visiting Officer
- Adaptation follow-up service
- Housing Priority Service – to assist access to general needs housing for vulnerable clients
- Housing Advocacy for young people 19 to 25
- Floating support for young offenders
- Specialist Housing Support Worker through probation linked to Multi-Agency Public Arrangement (MAPPA)

3.3.10 Due to the success of the BME Support Service, a BME Manager has been appointed on an 18 month contract. The Manager will be responsible for establishing links with the Councils Equality and Diversity Group to identify and formulate areas for corporate strategic development with regard to BME issues and engagement.

3.3.11 The Handy Person Service will continue to establish links with other organisations and departments. These will include:

- Falls Prevention – link with Primary Care Trust, Social Services, Age Concern and Merseyside Fire Brigade.
- Feel Safe – link with Police, Victim Support and Community Patrol
- Assistive Technology – link with Social Services and Wirral Partnership Homes.

3.3.12 The Service will also be looking for funding to ensure sustainability and explore opportunities for the expansion of the service.

3.3.13 A post has been created in the Home Adaptations Team (HAT) for a reviewing officer to enable feedback from previous clients so that the service can be improved. The HAT is currently working on a customer information pack to inform clients how to get the best from their adaptations.

Rehousing Services

3.3.14 Wirralhomes will be working with all the partners on a business case for a project to upgrade the current Wirralhomes IT system to increase efficiency and productivity, reduce costs and improve the customer's experience.

3.3.15 We will also prepare a business case to develop a new homelessness system to enable better case management and statistical analysis.

3.3.16 We will be responding to the recommendations of the Audit Commission Inspection and recruiting new members of staff to work on homelessness prevention and increase our work finding accommodation and supporting households in the private sector.

3.3.17 We will be seeking further dispersed accommodation to use as temporary accommodation for homeless households in order to reduce our use of B&B and we will be analysing the increased use of B&B for single person households in 2006-2007 in order to address costs.

3.3.18 We will also continue to monitor and improve our ability to find permanent accommodation for those households to whom we owe a full duty under the Homelessness legislation.

3.4 ***What will be the resource implications for the next and subsequent years?***

Housing Strategy

3.4.1 Funding for a number of projects through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund themes of 'Liveability and Decency' will cease on the 31st March 2008. The Housing Strategy Team will work alongside the Neighbourhood Renewal Team, delivery leads and the Strategic Housing Partnership to ensure projects are evaluated and sustainability issues identified are addressed.

3.4.2 Investment to take forward our commitments around energy efficiency and affordable warmth are subject to available resources being secured through external grant sources such as energy suppliers. The level and availability of resources will continue to have a significant impact on the Council meeting its strategic objectives as set out in the Housing Strategy, Affordable Warmth Strategy and Climate Change Strategy.

HMRI/Private Sector Housing Renewal

3.4.3 The service will spend £10 million HMRI funding and £6 million Council resources in delivering HMRI in 2007/08. It will seek to continue to maximise other investment such as English Partnerships. The next bid for HMRI will be submitted in November 2007, setting out a Programme for 2008/11, after the Government has published the outcome of its Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2007. The expectation is that there will be funding made available for HMRI nationally for 2008/11 but this may be lower than current levels so there may be implications for the Council over the longer term.

Supported and Special Needs Housing

3.4.4 Wirral Supporting People is recognised nationally as a successful service. The ability to continue to deliver this level of service would be considerably affected if funding through central government is reduced. Communities and Local Government (CLG) will announce a three year allocation in autumn 2007 for the period 2008 –2011. Depending on the allocation further judgements will be made on resource implication.

Rehousing Services

3.4.5 New IT systems are needed to maximise efficiency and customer service in Wirralhomes and Homelessness. Resources will be made available from spend to save initiatives.

3.4.6 The Homelessness Review outlined above will provide recommendations on the resources available and/or required to provide the homelessness and homelessness prevention service.

4.0 FINANCIAL & STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial or staffing implications arising from this report.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no specific equal opportunity implications arising directly from this report.

6.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no specific implications arising directly from this report. However, the Department is actively involved in projects that will have major impacts upon the environment and the well being of people in Wirral.

7.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are none arising from this report.

8.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Department is responsible for a number of important performance indicators and initiatives that relate directly to Community Safety. Full details of which are contained within the attached report.

9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are none arising from this report.

10.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 This report will be of interest to all Members of the Council

11.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Department of Regeneration Departmental Plan 2006/2007, and Performance Report for December 2006, and January/February 2007.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION

12.1 Members are asked to note the performance of the Regeneration Department during 2006/07.

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