



Housing Committee

Date:	Wednesday, 27 January 2021
Time:	6.00 p.m.
Venue:	VIRTUAL

This meeting will be webcast at
<https://wirral.public-tv/core/portal/home>

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AGENDA

- 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**
- 2. APOLOGIES**
- 3. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members are asked to consider whether they have any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

- 4. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 2)**

To approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020.

- 5. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

- 5.1 Public Questions**

Notice of questions to be given in writing or by email, by 12 noon, Friday 22 January 2020 to the Council's Monitoring Officer (committeeservices@wirral.gov.uk) and to be dealt with in accordance with Standing Order 10.

- 5.2 Statements and Petitions**

Notice of representations to be given in writing or by email, by 12 noon, Friday 22 January 2020 to the Council's Monitoring Officer (committeeservices@wirral.gov.uk) and to be dealt with in accordance with Standing Order 11.1.

5.3 Questions by Members

Questions by Members to be dealt with in accordance with Standing Orders 12.3 to 12.8.

SECTION A - KEY AND OTHER DECISIONS

- 6. PROPOSED AMANDMENTS TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING AND REGENERATION ASSISTANCE POLICY (Pages 3 - 10)**

SECTION B - BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- 7. BUDGET CONSULTATION (Pages 11 - 18)**

SECTION C - REVIEWS / REPORTS FOR INFORMATION

- 8. HOMELESSNESS IN WIRRAL AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 (Pages 19 - 42)**
- 9. EMPTY PROPERTY UPDATE REPORT (Pages 43 - 54)**
- 10. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE (Pages 55 - 62)**

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Thursday, 26 November 2020

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	J McManus (Chair)	
	Councillors	A Brame J Bird G Davies I Lewis	P Hayes J Johnson J Robinson S Whittingham
<u>Deputy</u>	Councillor	M McLaughlin (In place of M Sullivan)	

8 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed Members of the Housing Committee, Officers and viewing members of the public to the online meeting.

9 APOLOGIES

The Chair announced that apologies had been received from Councillor Michael Sullivan, and Councillor Moira McLaughlin was deputising for him.

10 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Committee were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, in connection with any item on the agenda, and to state the nature of the interest.

No such declarations were made.

11 MINUTES

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Committee held on 28 October 2020 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

12 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

The Chair reported that no questions or statements from members of the public had been submitted.

13 **NORTHBANK HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE FUND**

Sally Shah, Chief Regeneration Officer, introduced a report which updated Members on the progress made on bringing forward brownfield land for residential development at Wirral Waters, Northbank site with the support of Housing Infrastructure Funding grant from Homes England.

The report also provided an update on the forthcoming Strategic Housing Infrastructure Fund announced by Government in March 2020. It set out actions being taken to ensure that the Council, working with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, is well placed to secure potential Strategic Housing Infrastructure Fund funding once the details of the funding are confirmed.

Resolved – That the progress to date in delivering the Housing Infrastructure Funded activity at the Wirral Waters, Northbank site in order to bring forward the agreed number of homes be noted. That it also be noted that this supports the delivery of the Wirral Plan 2025 strategic ambitions, specifically with regard to driving forward the ‘Inclusive Economy’ theme, which seeks to generate inclusive and sustainable growth.

In addition, the opportunities for future Strategic Housing Infrastructure grant and the actions being taken to secure this funding in support of wider housing delivery targets be noted.

14 **HOUSING COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Members gave consideration to a report of the Director of Law and Governance that set out the proposed Housing Committee Work Programme 2020/21 as detailed in the appendix to the report.

The report advised that the Housing Committee, in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which were within the remit of the Committee.

It was envisaged that the work programme be formed from a combination of key decisions, standing items and requested officer reports. The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

Resolved – That the Housing Committee Work Programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year be noted.



HOUSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 27 January 2021

REPORT TITLE:	PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING AND REGENERATION ASSISTANCE POLICY
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to brief Housing Committee on the proposed revisions to the Council's Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy (referred to as the *Assistance Policy*) and agree the implementation of these revisions.

The proposed changes will assist the Council in meeting its objectives of the Wirral Plan, including 'good quality housing which meets the needs of residents'. Wirral's Housing Strategy has supported the 2020 Plan and clearly sets out the long-term strategic housing direction for Wirral. The Council has worked in partnership to deliver the ambitions of the plan and housing priorities working with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to improve the quality, quantity and access to housing. Building on this good track record, the Council will continue this approach as it adopts the new Wirral Plan 2025, its priorities and future strategies which the *Assistance Policy* has a key role to play. The proposed changes will also support the Council endorsed Cool 2 Climate Change Strategy and, in particular, the target to raise residential EPC ratings to Band C in the next 10 years.

This matter affects all Wards in the Borough.

This is a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Housing Committee consider and agree the proposed changes to the Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy, with immediate effect.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 It is considered good practise to regularly monitor, review and amend (if necessary) the *Assistance Policy* to take into account changes in local circumstances, service delivery, increased needs and / or Government policy. This report sets out the changes required to respond to those identified needs and ensure the policy remains fit for purpose.
- 1.2 Investment in adaptations is recognised by Government as 'invest to save' as the delivery of the proposed grant assistance will deliver significant cost savings for Hospital/Health Trusts & Social Care. For example the costs of responding to a fractured hip are 4.7 times greater than the cost of a major housing adaptation and 100 times the cost of installing hand/ grab rails. Postponing entry into residential care by just one year through a home adaptation can save £28,080 in social care costs.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Making no changes to the *Assistance Policy* was considered, however, this was ruled out on the grounds that the changes set out in this report would facilitate a more effective and responsive service, enabling a greater number of vulnerable households in need, to be helped.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (referred to as *the RRO* in this report) gave Local Authorities the power to provide assistance to improve living conditions in their area. This assistance can be provided under Article 3 for a wide range of purposes and can include such things as advice about property improvements and financial assistance in the form of grants and/or loans.
- 3.2 Wirral has had a Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy providing grants and loans for over 15 years. The current policy is Version 11.
- 3.3 Heating and Renovation Assistance
- 3.3.1 Heating and Renovation Assistance enables qualifying low-income vulnerable households to access heating improvements. We have completed two cases and approved a further two cases in 20/21 to date.
- 3.3.2 Occasionally, applications for assistance involve properties that are so cluttered with furniture or stored materials there is a serious health and safety risk to the occupant, for example, from increased fire, infestations, or risk of falls. This can make it difficult to survey the property accurately and can frustrate both finding a willing contractor and carry out essential works. Sometimes, it is possible to reduce the clutter working with the applicant, however, in a small number of cases, the applicant is unable to resolve the problem. This can prevent the assistance being processed leaving the

applicant in poor housing conditions. It is therefore proposed to amend the eligibility criteria to make provision for the removal of clutter. The cost of any such action will be incorporated in the overall work schedule and will be funded from the assistance available. This amendment would bring the product in line with the existing Adaptation Scheme Enabling Grant which makes provision for such circumstances to facilitate the timely installation of Council funded adaptation works.

In addition to this provision under The [Regulatory Reform \(Housing Assistance\) \(England and Wales\) Order 2002](#), there will also be cases identified by the Housing Standards Team, where repair work to the property is not required or necessary, but the degree of clutter still poses a risk to the occupier. In cases linked specifically to (i) previous accidents resulting in hospital admissions, or (ii) people prevented from being discharged from hospital due to the risks posed by the volume and nature of the clutter, or (iii) preventing a delay in the transfer of care, it is proposed to provide financial assistance towards de-cluttering. Any such assistance will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be limited to the budget available at that time .

3.3.3 In addition, it is also proposed to place a limit on the number of eligible tenants of large, portfolio landlords (those renting 3 or more properties), who can access the grant assistance for heating efficiency improvements. Officers would like to ensure that there is no exploitation by landlords to maximise grant funding to support heating improvements that would have normally been undertaken at their landlord's own expense. It is proposed that the number of applications for grant assistance from the collective eligible tenants of such landlords will be restricted to no more than 2 separate and individual cases per year.

3.4 Empty Property Grant (EPG)

3.4.1 Grant assistance is currently available to support the renovation of long-term (6 months or longer) vacant properties. Assistance is conditional upon the property being brought back into residential use. These grants currently range between £3,000 (located outside Selective Licensing Areas) and £5,000 (located inside Selective Licensing Areas)

3.4.2 Provision to meet the Local Plan 5 year housing requirement will include annual targets for the number of empty properties brought back into use through Council intervention, promoting a brownfield first and regeneration approach. The EPG programme is an essential element of this work. Whilst Wirral has exceeded its local targets in bringing empty properties back into use over the last 10 years we are now starting to deal with the more difficult properties, including some that have been empty for many years and are often more complex to deal with. To ensure we continue to hit the required targets over the next 5 years it is proposed to increase the grant limits from £3000 to £5000 and from £5000 to £7000. The increase is designed to make the offer more attractive to empty property owners. Capital Programme resources have been secured to support this increase.

3.4.3 It is proposed the policy is tightened to reduce potential loopholes, therefore the following applicants will not be eligible for assistance:

- Applicants who are directly related to someone that is either subject to enforcement action by the Council or has outstanding Council Tax arrears,

where Land Registry records show that the property has been transferred from that person to the applicant within the last 24 month period.

- Applicants who do not have the appropriate Selective or Mandatory HMO Licence and/or any enforcement action associated with Licensing, if applicable. This will ensure the Council is only assisting compliant landlords.
- A property should not be occupied until the completion of the approved EPG works and is free from 'Category One Hazards' as determined by the Health and Safety Rating System.

3.5 Time Critical Adaptation Grant (TCAG)

3.5.1 The Local Housing Authority has a statutory responsibility to consider applications for Disabled Facilities Grant funded adaptations in line with processes set out in Housing Legislation. However, Government recognises that in order to achieve Better Care Fund improved health outcomes and demonstrate innovation L.A.'s are encouraged to introduce flexibility in the delivery of home adaptations.

3.5.2 The introduction of this proposed financial assistance product will enable flexibility around removal of the means test for residents with an End of Life diagnosis including Motor Neurone Disease & cancers requiring palliative care as well as complex cases i.e. severe spinal injury cases where Hospital Discharge (HD) can't be enabled swiftly with interim measures in place at home.

3.5.3 The proposed introduction of this grant assistance will support applicants to remain in/return safely to their home in the shortest time possible with independence and dignity when time is particularly precious. The TCAG aims to improve the client journey as well as families and carer(s) ability to support the person; improving mental health at a difficult time.

3.5.4 Whilst this grant assistance will only be available to a relatively small number of residents, its impact will be significant to some of the most vulnerable residents in Wirral.

3.6 Repair/Replacement of Adaptation (Equipment) Grant (RAG)

3.6.1 It is proposed a further fast tracked, non-means tested financial RAG grant be introduced. The introduction of this product will enable some of the most vulnerable Wirral residents to access support, often when at crisis point for the re-instatement of their adaptation equipment through repair or replacement.

3.6.2 The Council's current approach is to advise the applicant that it is their responsibility to maintain/repair their equipment once installed and the standard manufacturers or extended Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) warrantee (currently 5 years for Prism installed equipment) has elapsed. If maintenance has routinely been carried out as part of an extended private repair/maintenance contract and the contractor provided a report which states, the equipment is beyond economic repair/obsolete then the Council will replace this, should the need still remain. If a repair/maintenance contract has not been purchased, then the liability remains with the applicant.

3.6.3 Several recent cases have identified that repair and maintenance extended warrantees are expensive to purchase with restrictions on minimum cover often not

including parts or replacement but still at high cost. It has also been highlighted that diagnostic reports provided by contractors can cost more than £1000 and some contractors will not offer to complete a diagnostic/condition report on other manufacturers' lifts.

- 3.6.4 As such, vulnerable applicants are being left in a position either unable to afford warrantees, paying for warrantees which are not appropriate, as well as being met with sometimes extortionate costs for a diagnostic of a failed piece of equipment, or an inability to afford the condition report, when they are in dire straits. This situation is not in the interests of the Disabled Applicant, their Carer(s), the Council, Health or Adult Social Care. As such it is proposed to make this Financial Assistance Product available to all tenures without a means test.
- 3.6.5 It is proposed that the RAG will support disabled persons with a determined need and/or who have received a grant via the Housing Adaptation Service on equipment such as Stairlifts, Ceiling Track Hoists, Vertical Lifts or Step lifts.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The revised assistance will continue to be funded by a combination of the Disabled Facilities Grant Determination as passported via the Better Care Fund to local Housing Authorities and already approved Capital Programme resources.
- 4.2 Earlier this year, it was approved that the Capital Programme will continue to provide support for Empty Property Grants going forward over the next 5 years, until at least 2024/25. A budget of £310,000 per annum is available, with a total of £1,550,000 over the 5 year funding cycle. This budget will achieve at least 50 completed Empty Property Grants each year, at the revised grant limits proposed in this report.
- 4.3 The total budget available in 20/21 for DFG and adaptations work, including Heating and Renovation Assistance, is £4.1m. Although, at the time of writing this report the budget for 21/22 has not yet been awarded, from previous experience, it is envisaged that this award will be similar to that of 20/21. With the exception of EPGs, all assistance referred to in this report will managed within the budget award for 21/22. It is anticipated that the proposed changes to close potential loopholes and limiting the number of applications that eligible tenants of large landlords in any one year will have little or no impact on the budget available. The inclusion of decluttering as an eligible expense in relation to Heating and Renovation Assistance applications will increase the costs of specific cases by estimated average of £1,000 per case. However, as the number of such cases are likely to be very low (anticipated to be less than 5 per annum) the overall impact will be minimal and these costs can be contained within the existing budget.
- 4.4. It is envisaged that the Time Critical Adaptation Grant (TCAG) will have minimal additional financial implications as only small number of cases fall into this category and of these 1 -2 cases per annum may have required an applicant contribution of 0-100%; with an estimated cost of £10,000. It is estimated that cases that would qualify for the Repair/Replacement of Adaptation (Equipment) Grant (RAG) would have a value of £200k - £300k per year; however there is capacity within the existing allocation to fund this. As referenced in Para 1.2 this product is envisaged to realise

significant savings for the Council, key partners and enable assistance to be offered to extremely vulnerable Wirral residents when at crisis point.

- 4.4 All services within the Financial Assistance Policy are subject to fees and charges with annual reviews as set out and published in the Councils Fee and Charges Policy. The fees associated with the Adaptation Service products contained within this report will be covered via the grant awarded to the Council in line with eligible use.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gives Local Authorities the power to provide assistance to improve living conditions in their area. The proposed amendments are made using the above power.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The assistance available in the revised *Assistance Policy* can be managed using current ICT, staffing and asset resources.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Increasing the grant thresholds for empty property grants may lead to a surge in demand that exceeds the budget available in any one financial year, however, this is considered a minimal risk as the mitigation would be for the budget to be managed in line with budget and performance monitoring procedures, with restrictions imposed on the number of grants available, should this be necessary.
- 7.2 The costs associated with decluttering can vary depending on the volume and type of work deemed to be necessary. In cases associated with grant/loan applications, this uncertainty could have implications for the remaining resources available to undertake essential improvement works. As with all quotations submitted, officers will continue to seek value for money by comparing prices to internal cost guidelines. Any cases exceeding the overall product threshold at application stage will be adjusted accordingly to ensure costs are contained, prior to any approval being given.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 There is no requirement to consult the public on changes to the *Assistance Policy*. The requirement is on having a transparent and public policy on assistance provided.
- 8.2 There has been significant engagement with a number of organisations, partners and stakeholders in relation to the development of these Financial Assistance Products including Adult Social Care, Health Trust, Children's Services, Residential Providers, Members/MP's & MND Society which has assisted in highlighting the barriers, thus informing product development.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and reviewed and is considered to be relevant to the changes proposed in this report without any changes being necessary- <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2017/economic>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The recommendations contained within this report are expected to reduce emissions of Greenhouse Gases and / or CO₂. The proposed changes involving heating and renovation assistance and empty property grants will assist towards the improvement in the thermal efficiency of houses and heating appliances for Wirral residents, often impacting older pre1919 housing stock. For example, the replacement of an F rated boiler with a new A rated condensing mains gas boiler gives an annual saving in the region of 992 kg of CO₂ in a semi-detached property. Keeping and extending the life of the existing housing stock through improvements also retains the embodied energy already captured in the building fabric, helping to reduce emissions compared with demolition and new build. This will reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, in particular CO₂.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002
Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy (V11)
The Housing Stock of the United Kingdom, BRE Trust Feb 2020

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Delegated Decision by Portfolio holder – Proposed amendments to the Financial Assistance Policy	25th April 2019
Delegated Decision by Portfolio holder – Proposed amendments to the Financial Assistance Policy	17th April 2020



HOUSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday 27 January 2021

REPORT TITLE:	BUDGET CONSULTATION
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report is part of the Council's formal budget process, as set out in the constitution and in accordance with the legal requirements to set a balanced and sustainable budget for 2021/22.

Policy and Resources Committee must recommend a 2021/22 balanced Budget Proposal to the Council for its meeting in March 2021, it is good practice for service committees to consider and feedback on Budget proposals.

This is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is invited to comment and provide feedback on the budget proposals which fall under the remit of the Committee so that those comments can be presented for consideration to the Policy and Resources Committee in February 2021.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 Policy and Resources Committee (P&R) is required to recommend a Budget to the Council for its meeting in March 2021. The Council has to set a budget for 2021/22 by 11 March by law. The issues detailed in this report support the recommendation which is a key step in facilitating the Policy and Resources Committee to be in a position to recommend a Budget proposal.
- 1.2 The Council's Budget supports the delivery of the Wirral Plan and is key to ensuring the Council is financially stable. Our residents and businesses expect to be informed and consulted about how services are going to be run and how their money is going to be raised and spent. The benefits of consulting with residents are:
- to improve planning, policy and decision making
 - to make better use of resources
 - to access new information, ideas and suggestions
 - to encourage greater participation in the activities of the council
 - to govern by consent (a full and fair consultation, with careful consideration of all views, can strengthen the legitimacy of the prevailing view among those people not in favour of the final decision)
 - to measure residents' satisfaction with the council
 - to shape council activities around residents' needs and aspirations

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 No other options were considered as the views of the Policy Committees are sought to enable them to be submitted to the Policy & Resources Committee for consideration.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Views are being sought on the Council's future budget and spending priorities, which will be delivered through a programme of community and stakeholder consultation.
- 3.2 The public consultation began on 21 December 2020 and will finish on 22 January 2021. The objectives of the consultation are:
- **Understanding:** Stakeholders understand the scale of the budget challenge, and how we are going about overcoming it
 - **Engagement:** Stakeholders feel able to contribute and that their views are valued and are being considered
 - **Support:** Stakeholders support the budget proposals, appreciate the work which has been done to involve them, and understand the reasons for budget decisions

3.3 The roles of the Service Committees is to formalise any feedback from the workshops in November and December 2020 and provide feedback on the proposals to Policy & Resources Committee.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.0 There are no direct financial implications from this report, however feedback requested is part of the consideration for the budget setting process, and as such, there could be financial implications.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council is required to agree a budget for 2021/22 by March 2020. The Council must set the budget in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and approval of a balanced budget each year is a statutory responsibility of the Council.

5.2 The provisions of section 25, Local Government Act 2003 require that, when the Council is making the calculation of its budget requirement, it must have regard to the report of the chief finance (s.151) officer as to the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. This is in addition to the personal duty on the Chief Finance (Section 151) Officer to make a report, if it appears to them that the expenditure of the authority incurred (including expenditure it proposes to incur) in a financial year is likely to exceed the resources (including sums borrowed) available to it to meet that expenditure.

5.3 It is essential, as a matter of prudence, that the financial position continues to be closely monitored. In particular, Members must satisfy themselves that sufficient mechanisms are in place to ensure both that savings are delivered and that new expenditure is contained within the available resources. Accordingly, any proposals put forward must identify the realistic measures and mechanisms to produce those savings.

5.4 Consultation must take place in accordance with the Council's duties under section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. It must be borne in mind that this is consultation on the budget proposals, not on the decision to take whatever decision is implied by the adoption of that budget. This is because the budget is a sufficiently high-level estimate or cap and, in relation to much of the estimated income and expenditure in exercise of the budget, not set in relation to the distinct decisions that will make up that expenditure throughout the year. As such, when setting and formulating the budget it would be difficult to compile a sufficiently detailed consultation document or undertake a focussed impact assessment.

5.5 It should be noted, however, that this exercise must also form the essential preliminary consultation under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 and section 27 of the Children and Families Act 2014, as well as due regard under section s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the public sector equality duty) and section 11 of the Children Act 2004 if consultation is necessary, where there is any significant, sufficiently focussed and, in financial terms, apparently rigid relationship of spending to a specific proposal, even if taken as part of the setting of a budget. The

consultation process, including the Council's consideration of the responses, is required to comply with the following overarching obligations (unless detailed statutory rules supplant these):

- Consultation must be at a time when proposals are at a formative stage.
- The proposer must give sufficient reasons for its proposals to allow consultees to understand them and respond to them properly.
- Consulters must give sufficient time for responses to be made and considered.
- Responses must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising the decision.

5.6 The results of the consultation exercises will form part of the report to Policy and Resources Committee. This will be under three headings and accompanying appendices concerning:

- (a) The public consultation responses, which will be presented in a form that allows the Policy & Resources Committee, and therefore Full Council, to be able to give conscientious consideration to the consultation responses in making their recommendation and decision (This summary will also be shared with all Members at the earliest opportunity);
- (b) The responses of the individual policy and service committees, the collation of which forms the purpose of this report; and
- (c) Consultation and comments received directly from stakeholders and from other sources

5.7 This is the same whether or not a public body was required to consult or chooses to do so. This is because all of those rules are aspects of an overriding requirement for 'fairness'. The process must be substantively fair and have the appearance of fairness. The setting of the budget and council tax by Members involves their consideration of choices.

5.8 When considering options, Members must bear in mind their fiduciary duty to the council taxpayers of Wirral. Members must have adequate evidence on which to base their decisions on the level of quality at which services should be provided.

5.9 Where a service is provided pursuant to a statutory duty, it would not be lawful to fail to discharge it properly or abandon it, and where there is discretion as to how it is to be discharged, that discretion should be exercised reasonably.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 There are no implications for resources as a result of this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The Council's ability to close the funding gap is highly dependent on the accuracy of assumptions used for Government funding and levies from other bodies, as well as demand estimates for Council services. As the Local Government Finance

Settlement only covers one year, the uncertainty around future funding over the MTFP period remains high.

- 7.2 A key risk to the Council's financial plans is that funding and demand assumptions in particular can change as more information becomes available. As such, the MTFP is regularly reviewed and updated as part of routine financial management.
- 7.3 There is a risk that external factors could impact on agreed savings, which means that may not be delivered or may be delayed. Progress on delivery of agreed savings will be monitored using Budget Monitoring reports presented to P&R Committee. As such the Council continues to hold a General Fund reserve of £10.7m. This represents a minimum level of contingency to support the organisation if savings cannot be delivered and no other options for mitigation can be identified.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Views are being sought on the Council's future budget and spending priorities, which will be delivered through a programme of community and stakeholder consultation.
- 8.2 The Council has also worked with staff and Trade Unions where required to ensure obligations in relation to statutory staff consultation is delivered appropriately and within agreed guidelines.
- 8.3 Should any financial proposals agreed by Policy and Resources Committee require specific consultation, the Council will commence appropriate consultation directly with any service users and stakeholders who are affected and will feedback their views before final decisions are taken.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 It is recognised that some of the developing proposals could have equality implications. Any implications will be considered and any negative impacts will be mitigated where possible.
- 9.2 Equality implications will be assessed during planning, decision and implementation stages and will be recognised as an ongoing responsibility. Equality issues will be a conscious consideration and an integral part of the process.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 No direct implications. The content and/or recommendations contained within this report are expected to have no impact on emissions of Greenhouse Gases.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Savings Proposals

BACKGROUND PAPERS

2021/22 Budget Transition Process (Policy and Resources Committee 7 October 2020)
Local Government Association: Consulting Residents

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Policy & Resources Committee	7 October 2020
Council	19 October 2020
Policy & Resources Committee	18 December 2020

Appendix 1 – Savings Proposals

Housing Committee

For most people, the thing which is most important to them is what they see when they open their front door. They want to see a clean street, which is well maintained and attractive. They want to live in a place which is free of anti-social behaviour and crime, and to be able to take an active role in making their community a better place to live.

Our job is to help make this happen. The everyday services people want the most – street cleaning, tackling dog-fouling, road maintenance, streetlights, grass-cutting – will be delivered to the best possible standard. Almost as importantly, we will be responsive: if a resident asks us something, we will answer – quickly, clearly and with empathy. We'll also tackle the growing problem of rough sleeping and homelessness. In Wirral, people will never have to spend a second night outside. We will redouble our efforts in working with these vulnerable people and we will keep them safe. We will ensure people have a good standard of housing.

OPTION	VALUE	NARRATIVE
Cease Support for Community Alarms	£500,000	The Community Alarm Service offers a low level support service to aid independent living and reduces the burden on social care and health services. The option proposes the removal of an annual programme of support used to meet the shortfall for low income and older people households, which could result in a saving of £500,000



HOUSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 27 January 2021

REPORT TITLE:	HOMELESSNESS IN WIRRAL AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION & PLACE

REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks to provide members of the Housing Committee with an overview of the issue of homelessness within the borough, and the measures in place to prevent and respond to it.

The report describes the significant impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the Council's housing team and its commissioned services that respond to homelessness and sets out proposed actions to respond moving forward.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Housing Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the content of the report and the excellent work undertaken on partnership between the Council, local communities, voluntary and charitable agencies and Housing Providers that have responded to homelessness throughout the pandemic.
2. Endorse the Wirral Triage Assessment process and the Next Steps Programme to provide a longer-term response to the pressures arising from Covid-19.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 To ensure that Members are fully briefed as to the Council's statutory obligations under homeless legislation and the actions taken and being taken, to effectively respond to the increased demand on homelessness services as a consequence of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 No other options have been considered.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The term 'homelessness' usually evokes an image of someone sleeping rough in shop doorways or on the streets, however homelessness can take many forms and is often not visible or apparent to the rest of the population. Other types of homelessness can include people living in homeless accommodation services (hostels), households that are threatened with eviction, those living in poor quality housing or those fleeing domestic violence.
- 3.2 Homelessness rarely has a single cause or explanation; it is most frequently the result of a combination of factors (*such as poverty, housing shortages, vulnerability through poor physical/mental health, substance misuse etc*). However, there will be some households for whom homelessness occurred solely as a consequence of one single catalyst, such as the loss of employment or a bereavement. Indeed, a significant number of, predominantly single, homeless people in Wirral present with multiple support needs and, by their nature, are defined as 'complex cases'. These cases can experience great barriers to accessing, and sustaining accommodation, and frequently require more intensive support and intervention.
- 3.3 Homeless legislation places several duties on a Local Authority in terms of its response to homelessness and the actions taken will differ depending on which category a household may fall under. These duties were significantly expanded upon with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) in April 2018 and which fundamentally changed how Councils were required to respond to homelessness. **Appendix 1** sets out in the duties and stages under the Homelessness legislation.
- 3.4 In order to meet its obligations under these duties as outlined in Appendix 1, the Council deploys a range of measures, or 'toolkit', to tackle homelessness which, in common with all English Councils, fall under either 'Prevention' or 'Relief' activities. A (non-exhaustive) list of these measures include:
- **The provision of financial assistance** which could be used to repay rent arrears to prevent a household from being evicted, or the payment of a deposit / rent-in-advance to enable a homeless household to secure a tenancy within the private-rented sector.

- **Assistance to secure Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)** which is an extra payment that can be awarded to households that are struggling to pay their rent.
- **Negotiation and/or Mediation with third parties** such as Landlords or family members to prevent someone from becoming homeless.
- **The provision of debt and budgeting advice** to enable households to better manage their money.
- **The availability of 'Floating Support' Services** who provide practical housing-related support to prevent households from becoming homeless and who can help develop the skills necessary to sustain housing in the future.

4.0 HOMELESSNESS DURING THE PANDEMIC

- 4.1 Nationally, the homelessness response to the first COVID-19 lockdown resulted in a massive mobilisation at short notice to cease traditional night shelters arising from the UK Government's '*Everyone In*' Campaign to provide emergency accommodation for everyone rough sleeping, at risk of rough sleeping (regardless of whether they met the normal legal duty), This has been an enormous undertaking and an intervention that has been recognised nationally as having saved lives, with infection rates and deaths amongst people experiencing homelessness at extremely low levels, when compared internationally.
- 4.2 Locally, the pandemic has resulted in a paradigm shift in the way that we respond to homelessness in the borough, and which has led to both opportunities and challenges to the Council and its partners.
- 4.3 In terms of simple presentations to the Council's Housing Options Service, it is estimated the total for this financial year will be the same as the previous year of **4174** enquiries. This has, however, to be put in context in that during this timeframe for a significant period no evictions have been allowed to take place which would, normally, constitute a significant proportion, if not the majority, of approaches to the service. Consequently, it is envisaged that there will be an increase in enquiries when court activity and associated evictions resume.
- 4.4 Similarly, within this context, the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent instruction to secure accommodation for all homeless households has led to an increased dimension of complexity to the enquiries received by the service. In particular, for single homeless people that would, under legislation, not be considered as 'priority need', and who would have typically been directed to night shelter provision, have been and continue to be dealt with by Housing Options Team through a triage system, in addition to the households who do meet legal thresholds. Due to the increased pressures and the instruction from Government to house everyone during lockdown regardless of any legal duty, a change in systems was required to ensure that 24 hour staffed hostel and support provision remained accessible to those individuals who required more intensive support/ had chaotic behaviour. Those without more intensive support needs were accommodated in hotel and B&B accommodation. This led to a significant increase in workload for the Housing Options Service and required other housing staff to support the response. This has further been compounded by:

- Landlords within the Private-Rented Sector have become increasingly risk averse in offering tenancies during a period of legislative change linked to protection from evictions under the Coronavirus Act.
 - Properties have remained ‘void’ for longer periods due to supply chain issues i.e. contractors and/or materials not being readily available.
 - The closure of commercial hotels and B&B which, historically, have been used to house homeless people occasionally, has meant that the Service has had to identify alternative forms of temporary accommodation, during a time of scarcity.
- 4.5 These factors will be further compounded by the fact that, traditionally, the Housing Options Service experiences a higher volume of enquiries in the final quarter of the financial year due to families struggling financially following Christmas.
- 4.6 Despite the challenges presented, the Housing Options Service has prevented or relieved **847** households from homelessness as at Q2 of 2020/21 and it is likely that, by the end of this financial year, the service will achieve a comparable figure, if not exceed the numbers delivered in 2019/20. This is, in part, due to enhanced partnership working with Registered Providers to directly match homeless households with vacant accommodation and the increased supply of new supported accommodation.
- 4.7 As in previous years, the main reasons for homelessness of those approaching the Council’s Housing Options Service continue to be:
- Families (or friends) no longer willing to accommodate.
 - Domestic Abuse
 - End of a tenancy within the private rented sector.
- 4.8 While still remaining as one of the most significant reasons for homelessness, the numbers of households that have become homeless as a result of the ending of a private tenancy have reduced dramatically. This is due to the previously mentioned measures implemented in the Coronavirus Act awarding a level of protection from eviction and the cessation of associated court activity during the lockdown period.
- 4.9 A point to note is the high level of family (or friends) no longer able /or willing to accommodate, which officers report was commonly linked to shielding/ protecting those vulnerable to Covid-19. However, in those cases where a family member was being asked to leave due to factors such as overcrowding, then officers from the Housing Options Team would encourage these households to stay wherever it was appropriate and safe to do so.
- 4.10 Prior to the lockdown, the Council identified that there were 13 individuals actively rough sleeping across the borough, with a further 30 people using the various communal ‘night-shelter’ settings. In line with the Government’s mandate to get ‘Everybody In’ and their instruction that communal shelters could no longer be used due to the transmissibility of Covid-19 and the inherent difficulties in implementing and enforcing social distancing requirements in these locations, the Council had to facilitate alternative housing options for this cohort.

- 4.11 Both the closure of key resources in the form of Night Shelters in parallel with the requirement to secure accommodation for every homeless household irrespective of whether they would fall under normal duties owed, created a uniquely challenging situation. In response, and to ensure that all Rough Sleepers (including those new to the streets) were identified and an appropriate housing solution established as quickly as possible, the Council implemented a daily 'triage' system with providers of local homeless accommodation services.
- 4.12 This triage system has proven to be so effective that the Housing Options Service has made 811 short and/or long-term housing placements (*n.b. This does not refer to individuals, as a number of individuals may have been placed on more than one occasion*) including supported housing, private and social and Bed & Breakfast accommodation. This approach has for the first time ever, resulted in Wirral being able to report **0** (zero) rough sleepers during the annual count we are required to undertake each year against previous reported figures in 2019 and 2018 being 6 and 16 respectively). As such, it is proposed the Housing Options Service continue with this daily triage system as a permanent response in the future.
- 4.13 Under usual conditions the Council will, typically, have around 30 homeless households placed in Temporary Accommodation / B&B at any one time. However, at the height of the pandemic in the Summer, over 120 people were placed in this type of accommodation and there continues to be a constant flow of people into this provision. Through partnership work, the Council was able to arrange for all people with support needs placed in B&B accommodation, to be visited regularly by Outreach Support Workers to ensure that their support needs continued to be addressed during this period of temporary accommodation.
- 4.14 In May, the Property Pool Plus Allocation Policy in place across the Merseyside Sub-Region was suspended, as is permitted in exceptional circumstances and all properties that would be normally advertised through this system were made available to the respective Merseyside Councils, on a nominations-only basis for homeless households. This was to enable both people who had no, or minimal support needs to go straight into general needs accommodation or to move people from supported living schemes into general needs to create increased access for these more complex households who needed intensive support. For Wirral, this has resulted in **120** people being matched for, and accommodated in social housing with a further **30** people being assisted to secure accommodation in the private-rented sector.
- 4.15 Previously, access to Homeless Accommodation Services (Hostels, Supported Housing etc) was facilitated through the Liverpool City Region online referral management system 'MainStay'. Essentially, this system would enable single homeless people to have their support needs assessed and then 'match' them with the homeless accommodation service most appropriate to their needs. In 2019/20, the MainStay System recorded that 1010 individuals were registered and assessed by MainStay services for accommodation and, of this number, 790 placements were made within these services.
- 4.16 As a consequence of the pandemic, MainStay's automated 'matching' function was suspended and all people accessing homeless accommodation services were assessed and placed via the aforementioned daily triage facility. Since the start of

the pandemic (2020/21 Q1 & Q2) 281 individuals have accessed homeless accommodation services.

- 4.17 The achievements and actions taken by Housing to respond and deliver homelessness services since the start of the pandemic has been successfully undertaken with the support of key partner organisations. There has been a significant collaboration to meet the challenges faced and the work has been supported through various teams and agencies. A list of those external agencies who have worked directly with the housing team with regards to the provision of accommodation and related support services are listed in **Appendix 2** of this report. The Head of Housing would like to formally record to the Committee that the response and services delivered, as outlined in this report, would not have been possible without the concerted effort and support of the housing staff and those agencies in being flexible and adaptable to changes.

5.0 NEXT STEPS ACCOMMODATION PROJECT

- 5.1 In order for Local Authorities to meet the additional requirements placed on them through the 'Everybody In' Programme and the recognition that accommodation to house some of those complex cases is not available, Government unveiled the 'Next Steps Accommodation Project' (NSAP).
- 5.2 The NSAP comprised two national funding streams: short term accommodation with support (£105m) and long-term move on accommodation (£161m of a 4-year total of £433m), making a total of £266m during the 2020/21 financial year for which Local Authorities were invited to submit a co-produced bid with MCHLG Advisers to support both a short and long-term response for responding to rough sleeping and to ensure those who were housed under the lockdown continued to be supported.
- 5.2 Over the Autumn period, Wirral Council received notification of being successful in its bid submission for the full amount of **£1.2m**, representing one of the largest awards in the North of England. Wirral's submission proposed the following:
- The reconfiguration of several homeless hostels and use of units within additional supported schemes to provide 11 additional 'Assessment Beds' for rough sleepers. This will include a fully disabled unit and units which have level access facilities to be flexible to support anyone with mobility issues.
 - Support for the development of a Social Lettings Agency, to increase access to private rented accommodation, administered by Wirral Churches Ark Project.
 - Enhancing and expanding Support Staff Teams to work with adults with complex needs.
 - The reconfiguration and refurbishment of new and existing supported accommodation to provide 36 units of long-term housing options for homeless people.
 - Request for the funding gap for non-recoverable Housing Benefit payments for B&B placements arising from the 'Everyone in' Programme.

6.0 COLD WEATHER FUNDING

- 6.1 In October 2020, a National £10 million Cold Weather Fund was announced to support Councils in offering accommodation to people at risk of rough sleeping during the winter by helping to provide more self-contained accommodation.
- 6.2 Wirral was successful in its request for funding and received approval for £81,050 to further support the range of accommodation solutions for homeless people during the cold weather period, and also to ensure the availability of temporary accommodation arising from the permanent refurbishment of hostel provision (funded through NSAP) thereby enabling the installation of self-contained 'Assessment Beds' for Rough Sleepers, alongside their mainstream hostel beds.

7.0 ROUGH SLEEPER INITIATIVE FUNDING

- 7.1 For 2020/21, the Council was successful in securing Government 'Rough Sleeper Initiative' funding of **£306,345**. This award has enabled the development of a 'mobile' (frequently referred to as Outreach) service which provides purposeful, proactive, and persistent support that aims to move Rough Sleepers from the streets into permanent accommodation. This service, known as the 'Rough Sleeper Initiative Outreach Service', is provided by the YMCA and works throughout the night to encourage rough sleepers to access appropriate accommodation. A range of tools are used through this programme and flexibility on use for funding to engage with rough sleepers who ordinarily will not engage with services. During the pandemic MCHLG gave even greater flexibility on the use of this fund and allowed authorities to repurpose elements of the programme. As such to respond to the 'Everyone In' Campaign, outreach workers have also been utilised to undertake assessment for those people who were placed in temporary accommodation and also to provide outreach support in a different way and enhance existing support services.
- 7.2 The work of the Rough Sleeper Initiative Team receives oversight from a Steering Group, which meets on a monthly basis and comprises representatives from; the Council (Public Health & Social Care), Merseyside Police, Homeless Agencies in the Community and Voluntary Sectors and a representative from MHCLG. The remit of the Steering Group encompasses both operational and strategic aspects; from identifying potential housing pathways and solutions for individual rough sleepers to gathering the intelligence base for future funding requests.

8.0 LONGER-TERM IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON HOMELESSNESS

- 8.1 Nationally, there has been a continued new flow of people experiencing homelessness since the start of the pandemic. Locally, during the initial stage of the pandemic, the increase appeared to be largely driven by those people that were already homeless, such as those who were 'sofa-surfing' or living in night shelters, on the streets and transient accommodation, and who became more visible as the pandemic forced them to approach services. Although exerting additional pressure on the Housing Service, this situation has provided the Council with an opportunity to engage with a cohort that is, traditionally, reluctant to engage and has provided the basis for meaningful change to the homeless landscape in Wirral. The needs of this cohort have largely been met through adapting existing service arrangements and

will continue to be met through the additional provision that will be enabled by our successful bid for NSAP funding.

- 8.2 Locally, it is envisaged that the profile of households approaching homeless service provision will shift to those that may not have previously used homeless services but who may already have been on the borderline of affordability pressures prior to the pandemic and as a result of low and/or reduced income, and for whom furloughing, or unemployment has exacerbated an already precarious situation.
- 8.3 Given the above, and at the time of writing this report no further extensions have been announced on the Government’s plan to hold off court activity and associated evictions, it is likely that, in the future, the Council’s Housing Options Service and other, related, areas will begin to experience further increases in presentations amongst those households threatened with, or at risk of becoming homeless.
- 8.4 However, despite these unique challenges presented by the pandemic, the Housing Options Service and its partners including Registered providers, other statutory agencies and voluntary and community sectors have worked collaboratively to enhance local partnership working arrangements which has led to a step-change in how support is provided to people experiencing multiple disadvantages and, as such, it is critical to build upon this momentum.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The delivery of the Housing Options Service is supported by a Council annual controllable Budget of **£984,000**. In addition to this a range of grants have been secured during 2020/2021 through both bid for grant programmes or via Government allocations to support the Council in delivering additional homeless services within Wirral. These total **£1,946,587** and include:

Flexible Homeless Grant / New Burdens Funding	£301,969
Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding	£306,345
Cold Weather Provision	£81,050
Next Steps Accommodation Programme	£1,257,223*

*NEXT STEPS ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME FUNDING BREAKDOWN	
Funding for short-term projects 2020/21 (Capital & Revenue)	£811,363
Funding for long-term projects 2021/22 – 2023/2024 (Revenue only)	£445, 860
TOTAL	£1,257, 223

- 9.2 Wirral has just received notification that the annual award for Flexible Homeless Grant for 2021/22 has been increased to **£513,579**. Officers are in the process of identifying programmes and measures to support those who present as homeless or are at risk to mitigate pressures.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The provision of a homeless service is a statutory requirement under the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

11.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

11.1 The shift to remote working as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic has led to changes in operational arrangements for the Council's Housing Options Service, most notably the cessation of an outward-facing emergency appointment system. However there has been over the past few years a channel shift in respect enabling a range of options for people to send in any information including uploading information, use of text messaging services etc. to enable the Council to be more responsive.

11.2 The pressures currently facing the Housing Options Service and with the introduction of the new triage system introduced during the first lockdown and the intention to continue to operate this has meant the Council has appointed two additional team members for a period of 12 months. This is being funded via grant which has been secured as detailed in this report. It is intended that this will be monitored as we emerge from the pandemic with a view to seeing if this requires any longer-term resource requirement. As this process is evaluated any implications regarding impacts on any Council budgets would be the subject of a further report for Members' consideration.

12.0 RELEVANT RISKS

12.1 The Everyone In campaign enabled a reduction in the risk to vulnerable people rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping to be delivered. The continuation of the triage assessment process continues to mitigate risks from the pandemic and other health risks to be reduced for some of the most vulnerable in society. Failure to continue with this approach will result in the potential that rough sleeping numbers will increase again in the borough and the Council will not be able to meet its strategic aspirations as set out in the Homelessness Strategy.

12.2 Any future withdrawal of current annual grant allocations to Wirral to support responses may result in a pressure to the Council's Budget. This would be the subject of a separate report to Policy and Resources Committee.

13.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

13.1 The triage process and next steps programme approach was undertaken in conjunction with engagement and collaboration with a wide range of partners. The Council has a Rough Sleeper Steering Group which includes an MCHLG Adviser and other key providers of services in Wirral, this group will continue to meet and engage on approaches to respond to ensuring that no one has the need to sleep rough in Wirral.

14.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

14.1 The work of the Housing Options Service seeks to respond to homelessness and rough sleeping amongst our most vulnerable residents who are subject to social

exclusion and equalities issues. The programme of works being proposed is to have Triage Assessment beds include for a fully adapted wheelchair user unit and all others will have level access showers to ensure that the accommodation can be flexible to meet the needs of any homeless person who may have disabilities/mobility issues.

- 14.2 The equality issues associated with the delivery of the Housing Options Service is assessed through both the 2016-2026 Housing Strategy (which can be found at the link below) and the 2020-2025 Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy (which can be found in Appendix 3)

15.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 The additional units of homeless accommodation obtained through the successful bid for NSAP funding will result in a reduction in the number of people placed in temporary accommodation such as hotels and B&B's that are dispersed across the borough. This will result in the need for fewer car and public transport journeys for visiting support staff. Given that the average petrol car on the road in the UK produces the equivalent of 180g of CO² for every kilometre, and with diesel cars producing 173g per kilometre, then fewer car journeys will lead to a reduced carbon footprint associated with this travel.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Summary of Statutory Homeless duties

Appendix 2 – List of external agencies

Appendix 3 – Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25 Equality Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Next Steps Accommodation Project Guidance and Allocations

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/next-steps-accommodation-programme-guidance-and-proposal-templates>

Housing Strategy 2016-2026 Equality Impact Assessment

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/communities%20and%20neighbourhoods/Equality%20Impact%20Assessments/EIA%20since%202014/Regeneration%20and%20environment/Housing%20Strategy%202016%20-%202026%20EIA.pdf>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date

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APPENDIX 1 – SUMMARY OF DUTIES UNDER HOMELESS LEGISLATION

All households (singles, couples, and families) presenting as homeless, or threatened with homelessness can receive advice and assistance from the Council, including the development of a 'Personal Housing Plan' that sets out steps, relevant to their individual situation, to be taken by both the household and Council to resolve their homelessness, or impending homelessness. The new legislation introduced in April 2018 placed a greater emphasis on self-help and actions that it would be reasonable for an individual or household to undertake to assist in resolving the problems they are experiencing. For example, it would be expected that if someone advised of affordability issues in paying their rent that they would engage in a financial assessment to establish any ways to help such as benefit maximisation, consolidation of debts etc.

This 'Personal Housing Plan' provides the basis for the Councils 'Prevention Duty' which, essentially, requires the authority to take reasonable steps to help the applicant to ensure that their accommodation does not cease to be available. Under this duty, the Council will first focus on steps which may enable the applicant to stay in her/his current homes which may involve assistance in securing a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) for those households struggling to make their rent payments, or the repayment of rent arrears. Where this is not possible, the focus is on securing other accommodation so that the applicant can move in a planned, and non-reactive way.

If the applicant is already homeless or becomes homeless despite the activity taken during the prevention duty stage, the Council will then focus on helping the applicant to secure accommodation under the 'Relief Duty' which seeks to minimise the length of time that a household may be homeless. This may include them being placed in temporary accommodation whilst a long-term solution is achieved. Such temporary accommodation can take the form of council-managed dispersed housing, Hotel and B&B accommodation or commissioned supported accommodation for single homeless people where people can be assisted to address any support need's they may have and gain skills to move towards independent living.

In the event that homelessness is not successfully prevented or relieved, the Council will owe the 'Main Housing Duty' to applicants who are eligible, have a priority need for accommodation and are not homeless intentionally. Certain categories of household, such as pregnant women, families with children, and households that are homeless due to an emergency such as a fire or flood, have priority need if homeless. Other groups may be assessed as having priority need because they are vulnerable as a result of old age, mental ill health, physical disability, having been in prison or care or as a result of becoming homeless due to domestic abuse.

Under this duty, the Council must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and their household until the duty is ended, usually through the offer

of a settled home. A suitable offer of a settled home (whether accepted or refused by the applicant) which would bring the main housing duty to an end includes an offer of a suitable secure or introductory tenancy with a registered provider (also known as a housing association) or the offer of a suitable tenancy for at least 12 months from a private landlord made by arrangement with the local authority.

APPENDIX 2 – LIST OF PARTNERS

- Wirral YMCA
- Wirral Churches Ark Project
- Forum Housing Association
- Excel Housing Solutions
- The Whitechapel Centre
- Wirral Food Hub
- Regenda Homes
- Torus Housing
- Pine Court Housing Association Ltd
- One Vision Housing
- Onward homes
- Magenta Living
- Sanctuary Housing
- Riverside Housing Association
- Alpha Housing
- Prima Group
- Family Housing Association
- Plus Dane Group
- Jigsaw Homes Group

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Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit (March 2017)

Section 1:	Your details
EIA lead Officer:	Sheila Jacobs
Email address:	sheilajacobs@wirral.gov.uk
Head of Section:	Lisa Newman
Chief Officer:	Alan Evans
Directorate:	Economic and Housing Growth
Date:	18 th February 2020

Section 2:	What Council proposal is being assessed?
	Wirral Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

Section 2a:	Will this EIA be submitted to a Cabinet or Committee meeting?
Yes	If 'yes' please state which meeting and what date
	Please select hyperlink to where your EIA is/will be published on the Council's website (please select appropriate link & delete those not relevant)
	Strategy (Health & Care, Intelligence, Communications, Growth, Health & Wellbeing, Strategy, Environment, Schools Commission, Housing Commission) https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2017-0

Section 3: Does the proposal have the potential to affect..... (please tick relevant boxes)

- ✓ **Services**
- ✓ **The workforce**
- ✓ **Communities**
- ✓ **Other** (Landlords)

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 4.

- None** (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to engage@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 4:

Could the proposal have a positive or negative impact on any protected groups (age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation)?

You may also want to consider socio-economic status of individuals.

Please list in the table below and include actions required to mitigate any potential negative impact.

Which group(s) of people could be affected	Potential positive or negative impact	Action required to mitigate any potential negative impact	Lead person	Timescale	Resource implications
age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation	<p>Wirral's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 sets out the actions to be taken to reduce levels of homelessness across the borough.</p> <p>A reduction in levels of rough sleeping (<i>and the associated anti-social behaviour such as street drinking, aggressive begging etc.</i>) should have a positive effect on anti-social behaviour over the long term. This may have a positive impact for older people, disabled people, people with a BME origin and those who may be persecuted for their religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender reassignment.</p> <p>The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy recommends a series of actions to</p>	No negative impacts	Sheila Jacobs	Ongoing	None

	<p>increase the range of housing options available to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness and to improve the range of information available about these housing options These recommendations do not differentiate on the grounds of race.</p> <p>Homeless people are amongst the most vulnerable in terms of socio-economic status with very few people being in employment. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy identifies actions to try to address workless-ness and to assist homeless people into training, education or employment where possible.</p> <p>The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy identifies a series of objectives to respond to homelessness in the borough. These objectives do not differentiate on the grounds of gender. The delivery of the strategy will have a positive impact on both homeless men and women alike, and identifies that female-specific supported accommodation needs to be addressed.</p> <p>Services available to homeless people can be accessed irrespective of marriage and civil partnership status. Single people and childless couples have separate provision from adults with children.</p> <p>The proposals contained within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy are not anticipated to disproportionately</p>				
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	<p>impact on people's religion/beliefs. Homeless accommodation services will continue to be required to recognise the needs of different faith-based observances and practices, and identify support needed for service users to access religious and faith-based groups and services through the support planning process.</p> <p>The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy does not differentiate on grounds of pregnancy/maternity. The Council commissions specific accommodation services aimed at homeless families and teenage parents, this group may include pregnant women.</p>				
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Section 4a: Where and how will the above actions be monitored?

Oversight of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 and its associated delivery plan will be provided by Wirral Homeless Forum, a multi-agency group comprising representatives from agencies that work with homeless people.

There will be the requirement for an annual update to be provided which also forms part of reports to relevant future committees.

Section 4b: If you think there is no negative impact, what is your reasoning behind this?

The proposals set out in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy seek to alleviate all forms of homelessness across the borough, irrespective of gender, race, sexual orientation, beliefs etc

Section 5: What research / data / information have you used in support of this process?

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 was informed by a robust review of homelessness in the borough.

Section 6: Are you intending to carry out any consultation with regard to this Council proposal?

Yes

If 'yes' please continue to section 7.

If 'no' please state your reason(s) why:

Public consultation for the review of homelessness and the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was undertaken between August 2019 and January 2020. Where appropriate, the Strategy was amended to reflect the feedback received as part of this consultative process.

(please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to engage@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 7: How will consultation take place and by when?

Before you complete your consultation, please email your preliminary EIA to engage@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer in order for the Council to ensure it is meeting it's legal publishing requirements. The EIA will need to be published with a note saying we are awaiting outcomes from a consultation exercise.

Once you have completed your consultation, please review your actions in section 4. Then email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to engage@wirral.gov.uk for publishing.

Section 8: Have you remembered to:

- a) **Select appropriate directorate hyperlink to where your EIA is/will be published**
- b) **Include any potential positive impacts as well as negative impacts? (section 4)**
- c) **Send this EIA to engage@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer?**
- d) **Review section 4 once consultation has taken place and sent your updated EIA to engage@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer for re-publishing?**

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HOUSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 27 January 2021

REPORT TITLE:	EMPTY PROPERTY REPORT
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE

REPORT SUMMARY

High levels of empty properties within neighbourhoods can have serious implications on the viability of communities, negative effects on housing markets as well as acting as magnets for a range of anti-social behaviour. Research has evidenced that strategies to deal with empty properties can have positive social, regenerative, financial, and strategic benefits which improve areas (See background paper W. Wilson/H. Cromarty/C. Barton, 2020, p.3). Empty residential properties also represent a wasted housing resource with a potential to be brought back into productive use. Wirral Council both proactively and reactively targets long term empty properties.

The Wirral Plan 2020 included a commitment to bring 1,250 empty homes back into use by 2020. To achieve this, the Housing Standards Team developed a number of initiatives that allow the Council to engage with long term empty property owners and work towards returning their properties back into use. These initiatives have been developed in conjunction with national housing policy and best practice guidance. Wirral's Housing Strategy 2016–2020, set out the long-term strategic housing direction for the borough, and includes a commitment to work with partners to target empty property interventions to bring long term empty properties back into use, whilst improving neighbourhoods and the housing offer in Wirral. The Wirral Council Plan 2025 builds on this and includes bringing empty properties back into use to improve communities. Work has also been undertaken on the potential inclusion of targets within the emerging Local Plan for the return to use of vacant properties as part of the overall housing supply across the plan period. The work involving bringing empty properties back into use supports the Council's Cool 2 Climate Change Strategy and, in particular, the target to raise residential EPC ratings to Band C in the next 10 years.

The benefit of a clear strategic focus to deal with empty properties in Wirral has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of long-term empty properties in the borough, year on year, from 2,982 in 2010 to 1,920, in 2019, an overall reduction of over 35%. (See background paper GOV.UK, 2020).

The issue of empty properties affects most, if not all, wards in the borough, although analysis of data has shown that significant clusters of empty properties remain in specific areas, including most of the neighbourhoods identified for Selective Licensing of the private

rented sector and further neighbourhoods which have been the focus of targeted intervention.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Housing Committee are recommended to:

- a) note the content of this report and
- b) approve the approach of interventions in this report to continue to tackle private sector empty homes in the Borough

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 This report sets out the current approach towards tackling private sector empty properties in the Borough and seeks approval to continue this approach going forward and establish a programme of enforced sales to deal with those empty properties requiring targeted enforcement action to progress a positive outcome for problematic empty properties.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Council is not obliged to have a strategy to deal with empty properties, but if the Council failed to address this issue, it is likely that the numbers would not have decreased in recent years, some neighbourhoods may have fallen into housing market decline and experienced environmental blight, and households that have been supported into accessing accommodation which was previously empty would not have been assisted.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Background

Bringing empty residential properties back into use has been a priority for Wirral Council via inclusion of targets within delivery plans and strategic policies which look to improve the availability of good quality of housing stock within the borough. The Housing Standards Team within the Housing Services Section is responsible for coordinating the approach to dealing with vacant residential premises in the private sector and providing reports on progress in respect of corporate targets. Officers undertake work on empty properties as part of their generic Housing Standards Officer role which involves a variety of tasks and responsibilities within the Private Sector Housing remit.

The work of the Housing Standards Team in dealing with vacant properties is both proactive and reactive. Proactive work includes a strategic approach to identifying the location of clusters of vacant properties via the use of available datasets and mapping software which enables targeting of resources and interventions in those neighbourhoods with high incidences of empty properties and informs how schemes and programmes are delivered. These areas include the Selective Licensing areas and other areas with higher levels of vacancy. Reactive work predominantly involves responding to referrals and complaints received from varying stakeholders in respect of properties which exhibit a wide range of issues from overgrown vegetation to decay / damage to the structure of a premises. Such referrals come from the public directly, other sections of the Council, including Environmental Health, external agencies, and local politicians. Dealing with the problems associated with empty properties often involves working across different disciplines to pool resources to achieve the desired outcome.

3.2 Data

Detail on the number of vacant dwellings at a local authority level is published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government from information recorded on the council tax base statistical release (GOV.UK, 2020), data is updated and published on a yearly basis with the 2020 information scheduled for publication in March 2021.

Data as of October 2019 indicated there were 4,722 vacant properties in Wirral, of which 1,920 were classed as long-term empties, meaning just over 40% of all vacant properties in the borough were empty for 6 months or more. The number for empty vacant stock available for general needs and affordable rent housing owned by Private Registered Providers was 254 properties. The total number of all vacant properties in the borough has decreased by just over 25% since 2010 and the number of long-term empty properties by over 35% during this period. This has taken place on a yearly basis over time, the only exception to this being 2018 when there was an increase of just over 6% in the total number of empty properties and followed a council tax data cleansing exercise which delivered a higher than usual reduction in the number of empty properties recorded for 2017, of just over 5%.

Through the targeted work of the Housing Standards Team, the corporate commitment to return 1,250 properties to use by the end of 2019/20, which was included in the Wirral Plan 20/20, was achieved early in 2019. The actions of the Housing Standards Team, in conjunction with implementation of available legislation, has consistently seen more than 250 empty properties returned to use achieved in every financial year since 2015.

The current level of all private sector vacant dwellings within the borough is 3.74% of the available private sector housing stock in Wirral, whilst the figure for the number of all long-term vacant dwellings is 1.52%. The figure for long term vacant dwellings owned by Private Registered Providers in Wirral is 1.12% of the general needs stock. The total of empty general needs stock in the borough has decreased significantly and by over 43% since 2010 with most Registered Providers being very pro-active in their void turnaround times.

Analysis of council tax data shows that currently 10% of the total of all empty properties in the borough have been vacant for a period longer than two years, those properties subject to the long-term empty premium, these properties are likely to include individual premises which exhibit the type of issues regularly associated with vacant properties and can have a negative effect upon neighbours, local businesses and areas. The return to use of properties vacant longer than two years and those causing a significant blight within neighbourhoods is a clear focus of the Housing Standards Team with an average of 131 properties being returned to use each financial year since 2017/18.

3.3 Schemes and Initiatives

The Housing Standards Team has within their toolkit various initiatives which have been developed by officers to assist owners to return their long-term empty property into use along with legal powers to intervene, these are set out below within this

report. Most suitable approach is determined by the circumstances of the property owner and their willingness to engage with the support and assistance available to return their property to use. An example of a specific successful case and the action undertaken has been included for Members within Appendix 1.

3.3.1 Empty Property Grants

Financial Assistance is available to owners of long-term empty properties to assist with the cost of capital works which will remove hazards from their property and enable reoccupation. The provision of Empty Property Grants provides support through financial assistance that can unlock the potential of vacant properties by contributing toward cost of improvement work that facilitates return to use of properties that otherwise would remain empty without grant funding. The grants often 'kick-start' the refurbishment process. Following the approval of a recent Capital Programme bid, funding for the period 2020 to 2025 has been secured to facilitate grants in Selective Licensing areas and strategically targeted 'hot spot' areas to be used toward capital works that improve the empty premises for occupation either by owner occupiers and via private landlords. In the case of properties brought back into use for private renting, grant conditions are imposed to secure both a better standard of accommodation and improved management standards. For applicants accessing the upper tier grant, upon completion there is a requirement to provide nomination rights to Wirral Council Housing Options Team to assist the council's obligations in respect of homelessness. During 2019/20 we secured 6 nominations and to date, during 20/21, we have secured a total of 2 nominations and should secure a further 9 nominations through upper tier Empty Property Grants before the year end. Since 2016 189 properties have been returned to use via the financial assistance provided through the Empty Property Grant Scheme.

3.3.2 Developers List

For empty property owners who are looking to dispose of their premises the 'Developers List' is a popular option enabling owners to publicise the opportunity to purchase an empty property directly to local developers who have confirmed they have the resources and capabilities to purchase, refurbish and achieve re-occupation of empty properties within a suitable timescale. The Developers List is administered by the Council and involves a sealed bidding process. A total of 3 properties have been sold and returned back into use through the Developer List in 2020.

3.3.3 Property Accreditation

The Council operates a voluntary Property Accreditation Scheme in order to drive up both property condition and management standards in the private rented sector. Membership of this scheme ensures minimum standards are met and rewards owners who provide good quality accommodation. In conjunction with the Housing Options Team, owners of empty properties that meet accreditation standards can get assistance to find tenants for their premises and receive further support to assist tenants in maintaining the tenancy. Accredited properties can also be advertised to thousands of potential tenants through the Council's Property Pool Plus website.

3.3.4 VAT Exemption Letter

The Value Added Tax Act 1994 allowed for certain goods and services to be provided at a reduced rate. This means that empty property owners whose premises have been vacant for longer than two years who are looking to renovate their property to return it to use it is possible to request a letter either from council tax records or empty property officers in local authorities to confirm that the refurbishment qualifies for a reduced rate of VAT for eligible dwellings.

3.3.5 Marketing

Various methods are used to inform empty property owners of the support and assistance available to return their property to use including; bespoke leaflet distributed with advice on the costs incurred in keeping a property empty and support available / holding drop in events during national Empty Homes Week and promoting and attending Sub Regional Empty Homes Group events to engage with empty property owners / publicising schemes and initiatives via Wirral View / inclusion of articles in Landlord Link-Up newsletter.

3.4 Enforcement

The Housing Standards Team receives regular referrals of problematic empty properties throughout the borough via a number of sources including complaints from members of the public, referrals from internal teams, referrals from external agencies, councillor and MP enquiries. Statutory enforcement powers are available to local authorities to respond to referrals and the approach to dealing with issues identified is formalised within the Corporate Enforcement Policy, unless there is a problem identified needing urgent action. Where required the Housing Standards Team works closely with colleagues in Environmental Health and Building Control to facilitate actions that remove blight and nuisance caused by vacant premises including issues such as properties being open to access, danger to public health from debris or conditions, anti-social behaviour, and vandalism. This is achieved through use of statutory powers.

Should it not be possible to arrange for the condition of an empty property to be improved, which may be having a negative impact on neighbouring premises or an area, through engagement with the owner the Housing Standards Team has recourse to legislation to enable action to be taken. Several legislative powers are available but the most used are those under The Building Act 1984 which allow for action to be taken to deal with dangerous or dilapidated buildings, insecure properties and the unsightly appearance of a vacant premises. Following a statutory notice period, the Council may undertake work in default and invoice the owner for the improvement works, should this action fail the Council will place a legal charge on the property to protect the Council's interest and consider the possibility of an enforced sale to recover the costs incurred. The Enforced Sale Policy has been established to enable recovery of outstanding debts owed to the Council, which can include council tax arrears. Should the circumstances involving an empty property meet the terms of the policy then the intention is to make use of this option to both recover debt and force the sale of a problematic empty property to a new owner. To date, there have been no enforced sales completed since the policy was agreed due to potential cases not meeting the terms of the policy, however, a number of potential

enforced sale cases are currently being considered with colleagues in the Legal Services Team and is our intention to make use of this power with a programme of enforced sales.

The Housing Act 1985 also allows for the Compulsory Purchase (CPO) of land (including buildings) for housing purposes, as opposed to demolition. Several factors are required to be considered in looking to progress the compulsory purchase of a vacant property as it can be a long and complicated process, particularly if an owner opposes the action and can only be done where the authority can demonstrate that the acquisition would be in the public interest. Another important factor with potential CPO action is having financial resources in place in order to fund the acquisition. Without the funding, this option cannot be considered. This option has not been used in recent years and other local authorities within the Liverpool City Region have encountered difficulties in obtaining approval from government when pursuing CPO action.

Since 2013 local authorities have had the power to charge additional council tax through a long-term empty property premium for those premises vacant for a period longer than two years. Further legislation was introduced in 2018 for more extensive powers including additional measures for properties that were empty for very long periods. Currently properties vacant over 2 years are subject to a 100% premium, this increases to a 200% premium for those vacant over 5 years and a possible 300% premium can be implemented for properties vacant for over 10 years from April 2021. As of 1st December 2020, there were 696 properties subject to the long-term empty property premium, an increase of 48 properties since the 1st January 2020. Of these properties 452 were subject to the 100% long term empty premium and 244 were subject to a 200% long term empty premium. Should a decision be taken to implement a 300% long term empty premium from 1st April 2021 currently there are 95 properties which would be subject to this additional charge.

3.5 Empty Homes and the Local Plan

Provision to meet the Local Plan housing requirement for the next 15 years is likely to include annual targets for the number of empty properties brought back into use through Council intervention, to promote regeneration and offset the number of new dwellings that will need to be provided as part of the development of the emerging Local Plan, work has been undertaken by independent consultants to review national policy and guidance, best practise, case law and current precedence for including empty homes within housing supplies and has been determined there is justification for including the work of the Housing Standards Team as part of the Local Plan's housing supply. This follows strong evidence on the consistent delivery of empty homes brought back into use over the past 10 years. Potential options have been proposed for the inclusion of target figures over the plan period and methodology which would add to the overall housing supply in Wirral. Any such, Local Plan target will need to be published for public consultation and examined by a Planning Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State before it can be formally adopted.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The capital programme has historically made provision for the financial assistance provided through the Empty Property Grants. Provision has been made to achieve a target of 50 completed grants each year. Earlier this year, it was approved that the Capital Programme will continue to provide support for Empty Property Grants going forward over the next 5 years, until at least 2024/25. A budget of £310,000 per annum is available, with a total of £1,550,000 over the 5 year funding cycle. This assumes the revised grant limits which is the subject of another report being discussed on this agenda. This budget will continue to target at least 50 completed Empty Property Grants per year.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The work undertaken in relation to bringing empty properties back into residential use cuts across numerous statutes. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The existing service provision both has and can continue to be managed using current ICT, staffing and asset resources.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Whilst work relating to empty properties has largely continued throughout the pandemic it is not yet known what impacts the pandemic will have on the housing market and any implications for the number of empty properties on Wirral. Numbers of empty properties have historically fallen through Council intervention but may well increase due to changes in the private sector and, in particular, the private rented sector. If this proves to be the case, there is a risk that the scale of the current approach may be insufficient to tackle the problem. This is being kept under review. We have recently distributed a questionnaire to Private Sector Landlords to request feedback on the effects of the pandemic on their business and to gauge their future intentions in respect of the Private Sector Housing Market and how it may be possible to provide support.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Engagement with empty property owners and relevant agencies is routinely undertaken by Housing Standards Officers undertaking Empty property work.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment was completed for Wirral's Housing Strategy 2016 – 2020, <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/communities%20and%20neighbourhoods/Equality%20Impact%20Assessments/EIA%20since%202014/Regeneration%20an>

[d%20environment/Housing%20Strategy%202016%20-%202026%20EIA.pdf](#) which considered work the Council does to bring empty properties back into use.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Work associated with bringing empty properties back into use is expected to reduce emissions of Greenhouse Gases and / or CO₂. Bringing empty properties back into use for residential purposes makes use of an existing under-utilised physical resource with carbon already embedded in the built structures. Supporting the renovation and return to use of these buildings ensures improvements are undertaken which retains the embedded carbon and, more often than not, includes the insulation of the building envelope and the installation or upgrading of modern space heating systems, reducing the CO₂ emissions generated had the property been occupied without improvements. Bringing empty properties back into use offsets the need for new build houses to meet local demand and supports brownfield first.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – worked example of a success storey

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- W. Wilson/H. Cromarty/C. Barton (2020). Empty Housing (England), House of Commons Library
- GOV.UK. (2020). Live tables on dwelling stock (including vacants), available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>
- GOV.UK. (2020), Council Taxbase local authority level data 2020 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/council-taxbase-2020-in-england>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – A Successful Turnaround

The Housing Standards Team were alerted to a possible vacant property and following an initial inspection by an officer, Figure 1, it was noted that the front of the premises was overgrown with vegetation and that the front door has not been used for some time. A review of council tax records indicated the property status to be occupied and following correspondence with the owner, they suggested they were occupying the premises.

Figure 1 - Initial Inspection of Property



Following receipt of further complaints, an enquiry from a local councillor and no improvement in the appearance of the property, a decision was taken to notify the owner of possible enforcement action to negate the effect the premises was having on the neighbourhood. Upon receipt of this notification the owner of the premises contacted officers and admitted to the premises being vacant and requested support in improving the appearance. Officers arranged for local contractors to provide quotations for the removal of debris from inside the property and for the premises to be secured against access as it had been occupied by squatters. Further to the clearance of the property, the owner decided to

dispose of the premises and the opportunity to purchase the property was advertised to local developers via the Council's Developers List scheme. Following an open morning held at the property, several bids were received by the owner of which one was deemed to be suitable.

After completing the purchase of the property, the developer applied for support through the Empty Property Grant scheme to assist with the cost of the required improvement works to return the property to use. A grant of £3,000 was approved toward a scheme of works, which cost approximately £30,000 in total and a full refurbishment of the property was undertaken by a local contractor. Following the completion of the Empty Property Grant process and confirmation that the premises met the standards of the council Property Accreditation Scheme, Figure 2, the premises were tenanted and returned to use.

Figure 2 - Final Inspection of Property



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HOUSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday 27 January 2021

REPORT TITLE:	WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION & PLACE

REPORT SUMMARY

The Housing Committee is responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which are within the remit of the Committee.

The work programme is formed from a combination of key decisions, standing items and requested officer reports. This report provides the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year. The work programme for the Housing Committee is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

Members of the committee are invited to comment on and note the proposed Housing Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1** To ensure Members of the Housing Committee have the opportunity to contribute to the annual work programme.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1** Various formats for the workplan were explored. The current format is open to amendment to match the requirements of the committee.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1** The work programme should align with the priorities of the council and its partners. The programme will be informed by:

- (i) The Council Plan
- (ii) The Council's transformation programme
- (iii) The Council's Forward Plan
- (iv) Service performance information
- (v) Risk management information
- (vi) Public or service user feedback
- (vii) Referrals from Council

Terms of Reference

The Housing Committee has responsibility for taking a strategic approach to the Council's various housing functions, including issues concerning social rented and affordable housing, homelessness, allocations and standards of housing.

The Committee is charged by full Council to undertake responsibility for:-

- (a) the Authority's role and functions in relation to strategic and private sector housing policies and as the housing authority, including but not limited to
- (i) the Council's Housing Strategy;
 - (ii) homelessness and the allocation of housing;
 - (iii) private sector housing, including taking action to remedy overcrowding, disrepair, unfitness and statutory nuisances; to promote fire safety in private sector housing and the Council's functions in relation to houses in multiple occupation;
 - (iv) licensing schemes;
 - (v) tenancy relations and the provision of housing advice;
 - (vi) relationship with Registered Providers of housing;
 - (vii) housing loans and grants;
 - (viii) housing related support services; and
 - (ix) policies and actions with a view to reducing and eliminating street homelessness to ensure that appropriate action is taken;

- (b) analysis, development and overview of housing policies in terms of spatial planning to submit to the Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee to inform the Local Plan and planning policies;
- (c) providing a view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management in relation to the Committee's functions; and
- (d) undertaking the development and implementation of policy in relation to the Committee's functions, incorporating the assessment of outcomes, review of effectiveness and formulation of recommendations to the Council, partners and other bodies, which shall include any decision relating to the above functions.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report is for information and planning purposes only, therefore there are no direct financial implication arising. However, there may be financial implications arising as a result of work programme items.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, there may be legal implications arising as a result of work programme items.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no direct implications to staffing, ICT or Assets.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The Committee's ability to undertake it's responsibility to provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, make decisions on policies, co-ordinate spend, and maintain a strategic overview of outcomes, performance, risk management and budgets may be compromised if it does not have the opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Not applicable.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

This report is for information to Members and there are no direct equality implications.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 This report is for information to Members and there are no direct environment and climate implications.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Housing Committee Workplan

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Council Plan

The Council's transformation plan

The Council's Forward Plan

The Constitution of the Council

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Housing Committee	28 October 2020
Housing Committee	26 November 2020

HOUSING COMMITTEE

WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

Contact Officer/s: Bryn Griffiths, Senior Democratic Service Officer
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PROPOSED AGENDA FOR HOUSING COMMITTEE

DATE: 27 January 2021

Item	Key Decision Yes/No	Lead Departmental Officer	Wirral Plan Priority
Proposed Amendments to the Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy	Yes	Director of Regeneration and Place, Alan Evans	Inclusive Economy
Budget Consultation	No	Director of Resources, Shaer Halewood	Inclusive Economy
Homelessness in Wirral	No	Director of Regeneration and Place, Alan Evans	Safe & Pleasant Communities
Empty Property Update Report	No	Director of Regeneration and Place, Alan Evans	Safe & Pleasant Communities

Deadline for Reports to SLT	Deadline for reports for briefing	Agenda Published
6.01.2021	12.01.2021	19.01.2021

ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEMS – WAITING TO BE SCHEDULED

Item	Approximate timescale	Lead Departmental Officer
Housing Growth Strategy – Delivering for Wirral (Key)	Between February 2021 and March 2021	Alan Evans
Central Government Housing Infrastructure Funding (Key)	Between February 2021 and March 2021	Alan Evans
Proposal to Acquire Units for Affordable Housing Use (Key)	Between February 2021 and March 2021	Alan Evans
Council Housing Building Options	Between February 2021 and March 2021	Alan Evans
Opening a Housing Revenue Report	Between February 2021 and March 2021	Alan Evans
Housing Needs of Care Givers	Between February 2021 and March 2021	Alan Evans
Right to housing for Travellers, Gypsies and Roma – negotiated stopping	Between February 2021 and March 2021	Alan Evans
Property Pool Plus allocations policy Consultation	Between February 2021 and March 2021	Alan Evans

STANDING ITEMS AND MONITORING REPORTS

Item	Reporting Frequency	Lead Departmental Officer
Budget and Performance Monitoring Report	TBA	Alan Evans
Housing Committee Work Programme Update	Every Committee	Bryn Griffiths

WORK PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE COMMITTEE

Item	Format	Timescale	Lead Officer	Progress
Working Groups/ Sub Committees				

-	-	--	-	-
Task and Finish Reviews				
-	-	--		-
Spotlight Sessions and Workshops				
Budget & Housing Workshop	Committee wide workshop	28.10.2020	Alan Evans	
Budget and Performance Workshop	Committee wide workshop	26.11.2020	Alan Evans	

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