

**What  
Really  
Matters?**

**Budget Option**

# **Restructure of Housing Strategy and Standards & Renewal Service**

## Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
206	0	0	206

## Option summary

The work of the Housing Strategy and Standards and Renewal Team is fundamental in supporting economic growth and attracting people to invest and live in Wirral and in ensuring there is quality housing which is appropriate and affordable both now and in the future. This option could see a reduction in the number of staff by up to seven to achieve a saving of £206,000.

## Potential impact

The work of the team enables the Council to identify and secure funding for a range of projects which directly impact upon people's quality of life and improve the quality and supply of housing available. The service also protects the most vulnerable people from living in hazardous housing conditions through a range of interventions including enforcement, advice and assistance. In addition, through a comprehensive approach of targeted resources, investment and funding secured the team alongside partners have a key role to play in regenerating local neighbourhoods and supporting employment and training through housing led initiatives.

Restructuring the service and reducing the number of staff will result in efficiencies through rationalisation and reducing service delivery in non statutory areas. This will have a particular effect on the most vulnerable people and the socio-economically deprived communities within Wirral. The team dealt with 3,589 enquiries for assistance regarding their current housing conditions. The team brought 296 long-term empty properties back into use in 12/13 and accredited over 200 properties as well as carried out in excess of 400 Healthy Homes Inspections to improve property standards for more vulnerable clients. In addition the team approved 22 empty property grants, completed 140 informal notices and served 90 statutory notices. The number of housing standards inspections carried out by the team last year was 2,640. Any reduction in the service would impact on the number of homes which could be inspected and the number of vulnerable people assisted.

The team further enabled over 239 units of affordable housing to be delivered with our partners which was 10% above target. This also significantly contributed to increasing new housing supply in the borough. Over the last five years, there has been 1068 homes delivered against a target of 833, £73.3m total housing investment has been secured alone for the 2011-2015 programme period, impacting on increased availability of homes, job creation, regeneration of neighbourhoods, improved outcomes for fuel poverty/child poverty and general health and well being. Specific employment outputs relating to housing led regeneration schemes include 13 apprenticeships created, 74 jobs for unemployed Wirral residents, 1,441 training initiatives delivered while developing 99 vocational and construction/inspection related courses.

If funding was reduced there would be an inability to fully respond to delivery of affordable housing, tackling fuel poverty and empty homes, delivery of landlord accreditation, grant and loan assistance to tackle sub standard housing. In addition, healthy homes inspections would be reduced to properties only where high risk hazards are reported and it is likely that response times would significantly increase.

The inspections currently undertaken for health visitors, social workers, children centres and other front-line services to ensure quality housing conditions for vulnerable households would have to cease and would only be carried out if a serious hazard is present.

## **Reducing the impact**

Options would need to be explored to deliver Landlord Accreditation via a self assessment approach with only 10% spot checks completed, however there would still be a requirement to retain some staffing service in order to facilitate this.

There would have to be a reduction in the extent of assistance offered to private residents for emergency repair cases and financial assistance would be limited to those most at risk. Reduction in service would impact on the ability to attract inward investment and contribute to cross authority initiatives and funding opportunities therefore these would be prioritised with regards to those which could generate the greatest reward.

There would be a requirement to generally prioritise all the work we undertake.