

**CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT**

<b>REPORT OF</b>	<b>Councillor George Davies</b>
<b>CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR</b>	<b>Neighbourhoods, Housing and Engagement</b>
<b>CO-ORINATING CHIEF OFFICER</b>	<b>Emma Degg, Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement</b>

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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

**1. ENABLING NEW HOUSING SUPPLY**

Quarter 1 of 2014/15 saw the completion of 46 affordable housing units (5 units over the target set due to unexpected Help To Buy completions). Completions for Quarter 1 included the final eight affordable rent bungalows at the former Poulton House site, Wallasey. This has enabled six households on the Disabled Persons Housing Register and three clients from the Learning Disability Housing Panel to access level access housing built to the Lifetime Homes standard and adjacent facilities at the Willowbank Extra Care scheme. These units scheme saw £866,329 inward investment for Wirral, of which £142,896 was Homes and Communities Agency grant.

From April to August 2014 there have been 20 Help To Buy completions across sites at St James Gate in Birkenhead, Sevenoaks in Rock Ferry and Carlett Glade in Eastham, assisting first time buyers in accessing the housing ladder. The Council is on track to meet this year's target of bringing 265 empty properties back into use. In May 2014 a property was sold from the Home Ownership Using Sustainable Empty Dwellings (HOUSED) scheme enabling low cost home ownership whilst bringing an empty property back into use. June 2014 saw the start of development on bringing back three empty properties back into use seeing inward investment of £57,341 of which £18,000 was Homes and Communities Agency grant.

Wirral was successful in securing £2.15million for all the 111 units reported at Cabinet 14<sup>th</sup> July 2014 under the Homes and Communities Agency 2015-18 Affordable Homes programme. This will see sites in Tranmere, Moreton, Oxtown and Bebington being developed under the Affordable Rent tenure by March 2018.

**2. HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY / AFFORDABLE WARMTH**

Housing Strategy, Standards & Renewal will embark upon its Winter Warmth Campaign again this autumn. The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness of the assistance available to support vulnerable residents through the colder winter months. Winter Warmth packs will be distributed mainly through the Food Banks and officers will support Age UK Wirral's upcoming Electric Blanket Testing Days. Officers have recently formed a new partnership with United Utilities which resulted in free training for two front-line officers in order for them to advise clients on help available to those in debt on their

water bills and on simple water saving actions. Free water saving packs are also being obtained to distribute with the Winter Warmth packs.

### **3. ENFORCEMENT & SELECTIVE LICENSING**

The Housing Standards Team have been strengthening and aligning enforcement powers in the team signalled by cases being brought to court and the development of Selective Licensing proposals.

Last month a landlord who rented out a property with serious hazards and defects in Wirral has pleaded guilty to not complying with an Improvement Notice served by Wirral Council. He was fined a total of £ 1,000 for three offences by Wirral Magistrates Court in what the judge described as “serious offences”. The council recovered all costs incurred in bringing the case to court, carried out the repairs and placed a charge of around £3,500 on the property. The action taken in this case reinforces the message that landlords must maintain their properties to a reasonable standard, in order that the health & safety of often vulnerable tenants are protected.

Some neighbourhoods in Wirral have much higher proportions of private rented stock and also suffer from symptoms of low demand including high numbers of empty properties, poor property condition, low property values and a high turnover of tenants. A report by the Performance & Public Health Team has been completed to provide the supporting evidence and rationale for introducing Selective Licensing to a number of areas suffering acute problems of low demand. A Business Case for Selective Licensing and Communication Strategy for engagement with stakeholders are now being finalised and will suggest how a scheme could stabilise these areas, improve the quality of housing and the environment to the benefit of the whole community. This will be reported to Cabinet in November.