

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor George Davies
CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR	Neighbourhoods, Housing and Engagement
CO-ORINDATING CHIEF OFFICER	Emma Degg, Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement

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 2 of 2014/15 saw the completion of 79 affordable housing units in Wirral. Completions included 33 units for affordable rent on the site of the former Poulton Primary School made up of 8 x one bed apartments, 4 x two bed apartment, 3 x two bed bungalows, 16 x two bed houses and 4 x 3 bed houses. The development saw inward investment for Wirral of £3.14million, of which £0.45million was Homes and Communities Agency grant.

Quarter 2 also saw the commencement of Regenda's contract for the re-development of the derelict Cygnet pub in Birkenhead, into 10 x one bed apartments and four x 2 bed apartments for Affordable Rent for completion in 2015/16. This scheme will see inward investment for Wirral of £1.2million of which £364,126 is being funded through Homes and Communities Agency grant.

In addition, Quarter 2 saw first time buyers being assisted on to the housing ladder and households facing repossession being able to remain in their homes. There were 16 households who utilised the Government's Help To Buy equity loan to purchase a new build home across sites in Rock Ferry, Birkenhead North and Eastham. Two households assisted to bring back empty properties into use, by purchasing homes under Riverside Housing Association's Own Place scheme which assists by giving a 25% discount. In addition, four households facing repossession were enabled to remain in their homes through the Mortgage Rescue scheme.

2. HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY / AFFORDABLE WARMTH

Wirral Council took part in the promotion of the 3rd Liverpool City Region Collective Energy Switch, which closed on 29th September 2014. A Collective Energy Switch brings households together that are interested in changing energy suppliers to reduce their energy costs. By grouping together, buying power is increased to negotiate cheaper tariffs from energy suppliers. The scheme offers greater support and advice to consumers, particularly vulnerable consumers, compared to switching supplier themselves. It also encourages switching amongst households that haven't previously considered it, estimated to be around 50% of all Wirral households.

717 Wirral residents registered with scheme manager Energy Projects Plus and 174 switched suppliers. Wirral had the highest number of registrations by local authority area and the highest number of people switching. Those who switched saved an average of £203 a year on their energy bills. One Wirral resident saved £825 and a significant number of people were able to save over £500 a year. The next Collective Switch is due to take place between January and March 2015.

3. ENFORCEMENT & SELECTIVE LICENSING

A comprehensive consultation on plans to radically improve living standards in four designated parts of the borough begins next week and will run for a 10 week period from to 24th November 2014, finishing in February 2015. The areas identified for the Selective Licensing scheme fall within Birkenhead South, Egerton North, Seacombe Library and Egremont Promenade South.

These areas are experiencing the highest levels of low demand in the borough caused by factors such as high numbers of vacant properties and low house prices and rental values. The introduction of a scheme in specific, targeted areas would help to stabilise these neighbourhoods by declaring an intention to drive up property management practice and property standards in the private rented sector as well as helping to solve other issues contributing to low demand within a neighbourhood.

A Selective Licensing scheme would require landlords in certain areas to purchase a license from the Council and commit to meeting certain requirements, including bringing their property up to a good standard, in order to be legally allowed to put their homes on the rental market.

A variety of methods will be used as part of the consultation to engage with a range of stakeholders including tenants, residents, landlords, service providers, council staff, members and National and Regional Landlord organisations. The consultation results and the final Selective Licensing Business Case will be reported back to Cabinet in spring 2015.

4. ALLOCATION OF HOUSING / MEETING HOUSING NEED

A revised version of the Property Pool Plus Policy approved by Cabinet in October 2014 is due for implementation in January 2015. The Policy has been revised due to the introduction of the Localism Act, introduction of Legislation regarding rehousing for Armed Forces Personnel, and operational experience since Property Pool Plus was introduced in July 2012.

The most significant changes include additional provision for former members of the Armed Forces who meet certain criteria relating to their housing need, relaxation of the criteria for the award of a priority status due to employment, prevention of those who have been rehoused via the scheme from re-registering for 12 months, change to the number of bedrooms a household can apply for in line with Housing Benefit regulations, provision to award a priority to prevent homelessness. These amendments to the policy should assist with:-

- building sustainable communities,
- encouraging economic activity,
- tackling low demand for some property types,
- tackling potential homelessness in a timely manner preventing the need for temporary accommodation, and
- assisting former Armed Forces Personnel in need of rehousing.