

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor Stuart Whittingham
CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR	Housing and Planning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning to Members of the Council on matters relevant to the portfolio.

House building:

In the second quarter of this financial year, 76 affordable homes were completed, bringing the cumulative total this year so far to 515, which includes 267 Help to Buy units. Construction of 439 homes - which consist of affordable rent, shared ownership and rent to buy units - commenced during the first two quarters of 2018/19.

Housing standards:

The Warmer Wirral network generated 527 referrals to the Local Energy Advice Programme, resulting in 407 home visits that provided energy efficiency and fuel poverty related advice, leading to more than £100,000 worth of energy bill savings so far.

In October, consultation concluded on a plan to re-designate a scheme in the four Selective Licensing areas which were introduced in 2015, as well as extending into two further areas. Consultation results are being collated and will be reported to Cabinet for a final decision.

New enforcement powers – Civil Penalties and Rent Repayment Orders – are now in place following Cabinet approval of the Housing Enforcement Policy Statement and policies and we had the first successful Rent Repayment Order recently will result in an income of £988.

Tackling empty properties:

At a time when Wirral is looking to increase the availability of good quality housing, having perfectly good properties around the borough sat empty and unoccupied is not a good look.

Bringing these empty properties back into use for the benefit of those who need accommodation is therefore a big priority and we have been empowering the Housing Renewal Team to take action to address the issue.

In the second quarter of 2019 the number of 'completions' on empty homes is at 1,315 against a quarterly target of 1,250. This means a significant increase in the supply of much needed housing, a reduction in the level of homelessness in the borough and a contributory factor in regenerating neighbourhoods.

Home adaptations:

The number of home adaptations that were carried out in Wirral in the second quarter of this year is 1,403 against a target of 1,276.

Home adaptations can range from minor pieces of work such as installing grab rails or shower seating, to more major works like installing stairlifts and ramps and widening doorways.

Homelessness:

336 homeless preventions were achieved for the second quarter of 2019. There were no targets set in this regard due to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018, which introduced new processes and procedures and requires the length of time to work with clients to be increased to 56 days - double previous requirements.

In the last update, I mentioned how the Liverpool City Region Housing First Test and Learn pilot got underway in July 2019. To date, 21 referrals have been made to the service from the Wirral area and the initial results are very positive as these clients are homeless and have complex needs.

Refugees and asylum seekers:

An action plan for Refugees and Asylum Seekers has been developed which responds to Liverpool City Region Action Plan, Controlling Migration Fund priorities and local priorities in Wirral for refugees and asylum seekers. One pilot scheme was commissioned early on to focus on education support for both schools and refugee and asylum seeker children to ensure education opportunities are maximised.

A small grant programme targeting key themes within the action plan was opened on 23rd September 2019 and organisations were asked to bid for up to two years funding to respond to the appropriate themes identified. All applications have now been assessed by a Panel with and six voluntary and community sector organisations have been allocated funds totalling more than £90k.