

## **Report for the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Planning**

### **Affordable Homes**

Wirral is making good progress with its affordable housing programme with the number of completions at the end of Q3 being 567 homes and an additional new 291 Help to buy homes. Within this programme, Wirral is working towards providing several specialist housing schemes including extra care housing schemes for older people and people with learning or physical difficulties which combine accommodation with care and support services.

Following successful completion on 28th February, Mersey Gardens in Tranmere will be officially opened. This development by HB Villages provides 20 one-bedroom apartments with care provision for adults with learning or physical disabilities, enabling them to live independently in the community. Officers have worked closely with the developer, housing association and care provider to ensure the scheme clearly meets the needs of local people who require this type of accommodation and all new tenants have been nominated for apartments by the council.

Two Extra Care schemes for older people are currently on site; Barncroft in Pensby, which will provide 21 apartments and is due to complete before the end of March 2020 and Poppyfield in Saughall Massie, the former Girtrell Court site which will provide 78 apartments in the autumn of this year.

A further site of the former Rock Ferry High School will also see 186 affordable housing units of which 102 will be within an extra care scheme for older people. The sale of the land to Torus was agreed by Cabinet in January and planning permission was also granted at February Planning Committee. These two major milestones will enable Torus to start on site by the end of March 2020.

There is a proposal for a further 53 units of extra care housing for older people on the Greenheys site in Liscard, on land adjacent to Victoria Central hospital. This potential scheme is scheduled to be presented to Planning Committee on 20th March and if successful in securing approval, it is anticipated that the scheme will progress to on site start soon after.

### **Selective Licensing**

Cabinet approved a new business case this month to extend the Council's first Selective Licensing Scheme to a further two new areas for a five-year period from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020. The first scheme has now been operating since 2015 and was due to come to an end in June 2020. This will bring the total number of small areas in Wirral subject to Selective Licensing to 10 and will increase the number of private rented properties that will require a licence to over 2500.

Wirral continues to take robust enforcement action on landlords that fail to comply with licensing conditions. Private rented properties in these areas have an extremely low level of compliance (26.78%) with licensing conditions. The Council as a result,

has prosecuted 57 offences specifically where landlords & agents refused to co-operate with licensing requirements.

### **Property Pool Plus Review of Housing Allocations**

A Review of the LCR Local Authorities Housing Allocations Policy/Choice Based Lettings Scheme of which Wirral is a partner (Property Pool Plus) is underway with External Consultants Neil Morland & Co. There has been positive delivery against milestones with an interim report produced, wider consultation is planned for later in the year.

### **Homelessness**

As part of the councils statutory duties, an extensive review of Homelessness and related services was completed in December 2019. The findings have formed the basis of a new draft Wirral Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-2025, which will be presented to Cabinet for approval on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

The strategy and concise delivery plan set a clear direction for early homeless intervention and prevention, and service delivery to meet the needs of local residents and to reduce rough sleeping levels.

The Council has been successful in securing funding from MHCLG grant programmes to enable the commissioning of a night-time outreach service, targeted at rough sleeping for 2019/20. This service, along with partners, has reported early successes in reducing rough sleeping levels from 16 individuals noted in the official Rough Sleeping Count of 2018, to 6 rough sleepers in 2019.

Officers in Housing have been successful in securing further grant resources for 2020/21, which is extremely positive in providing further co-ordinated activity across both the Council and its partners providing support to both those in hostel accommodation and those who are or at risk of sleeping rough.

There were a total of 313 homeless preventions achieved in Quarter 3, bringing the overall total to date in 2019/20 to 977. The Council continues to work collaboratively with the other LCR authorities and the Combined Authority regarding early intervention and prevention, and funding for 3 'trailblazer' posts has been secured in Wirral. These posts are enhancing and complementing existing housing services.

### **Home energy**

The Council is working with local charity, Energy Projects Plus, AgilityEco and Affordable Warmth Solutions, to offer fully funded central heating to residents who don't currently have gas central heating.

Connected for Warmth, is a new service designed to help eligible private and private rented sector households make big savings on their fuel bills. The scheme, covering

areas across the country, will provide a free first-time gas connection and energy-efficient heating system to eligible fuel poor homes in Wirral.

It is funded by the Warm Homes Fund, a £150 million national fund provided by National Grid and administered by Affordable Warmth Solutions. Cadent are also contributing towards the cost of the heating systems.

To be eligible, residents need to be in receipt of qualifying benefits, or qualify under Wirral Council's Eco Flex criteria. Eligible residents will receive a free gas connection and new gas central heating system, utilising the latest energy efficient boilers.

While homeowners and tenants will pay nothing toward the scheme, private landlords will need to make a small contribution to have a system installed, should their property be eligible.