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**Issue 2 Housing Partnership Newsletter May 2004**

### Beacon Award for Housing Renewal



The Beacon Council scheme was established in 1999 by the Government to select a number of councils to act as pace setters and centres of excellence.

Wigan Council won its second 'Beacon' award at a ceremony in London on Tuesday 6th April 2004. The Council is already considered a 'Beacon' of excellence for its Neighbourhood Renewal efforts and has now received a similar accolade in the related field of Housing Renewal.

Government Office North West is highly impressed with Wigan Council's approach to Private Sector Housing Renewal and the Housing Inspectorate describes the service as "an Excellent Three Star Service which will improve".

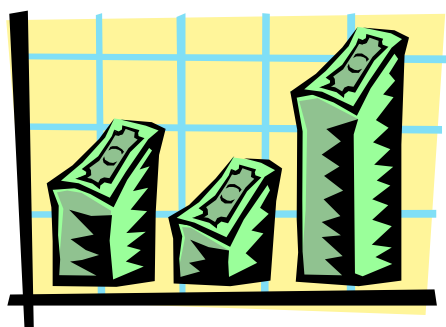
Areas of good practice singled out by inspectors include 'customer focus', 'customer care' and the 'use of data and intelligence to deliver cost effective services'.



A Wigan delegation travelled to London to receive the award from Local Government Minister, Nick Raynsford (centre). They included (l-r) Bill Horton (Principal Officer – Private Sector Housing); David Molyneux (Cabinet Member for Regeneration); Barry Hailwood (Private Sector Housing Services Manager); and Barbara Nettleton from the One Voice Residents' Association.

For further information about the Beacon Awards, see: [www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/council/beacon/](http://www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/council/beacon/)

## Capital Allocation



In July of each year, the Council submits its Housing Investment Programme (outlining the amount of capital funding needed on private sector housing in the Borough), its Housing Strategy and its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan to the Government for assessment.

In response to this, the North West Regional Housing Board has announced that Wigan Council will receive a Housing Capital Allocation of £4,615,000 for 2004/05 (including £481,000 for Disabled Facilities Grant) - the eighth highest in the North West. This represents an increase of 20% over last year. This is the first year that funding has been allocated by the newly-created Regional Housing Board, which has used discretionary powers to move funding between authorities so that more money goes into areas of greatest need.

The money will be used to fund the Council's new Policy Framework for providing Housing Financial Assistance to private home owners across the Borough. It will allow us to continue the existing successful approach, which targets the most vulnerable low income households living in unfit homes, people with disability, Clearance and Renewal Areas, empty homes and home security measures.

We have also recently been informed that the Council's Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan have met the Government's "Fit for Purpose" criteria. Wigan is one of the first local authorities to reach this standard. It means that the Government are satisfied that the documents are robust and will no longer need to be updated annually.

## Landlords Accreditation

Anybody who has tried to find decent privately rented housing knows what a struggle it can sometimes be. In Wigan, help is on the way following the launch of a 'Landlords Accreditation Scheme' by the North West Landlords' Association.



Pictured at the launch are (l-r) Phil Gibbs, Peter Hall, Cllr David Molyneux and John O' Donnell.

Wigan's accreditation scheme, unlike those in other parts of the country, will be independently audited by Wigan Council to make sure only the best properties are listed.

Under the scheme, properties will only be accredited if they meet certain minimum standards. They must be fit for occupation, in good repair and be properly managed by the landlord. These standards will apply to all tenanted properties, but in the case of houses in multiple occupation, some additional minimum requirements apply, notably fire precautions and the provision of adequate means of escape.

Phil Gibbs of the North West Landlords' Association said: *"Both ourselves and the Council want to help residents find good private landlords, and I would advise anybody thinking of renting from a private landlord to check they are accredited. Accredited landlords will not only ensure their properties are safe and healthy to live in, they will also try quickly to resolve any problems that may arise."*

For further information, contact the North West Landlords' Association on 0845 345 1386 or e-mail: [admin@nwla.co.uk](mailto:admin@nwla.co.uk)

## Asylum Seekers

Over the last few years, a lot has been said and written about people seeking asylum in the UK. But just how much can you believe, when the opinions you hear and read are so diverse?

Wigan Council are in the process of updating their leaflet entitled "Asylum – Questions & Answers". A draft version is currently out for consultation. If you would like a copy, please contact the Housing Strategy Section on 01942 827446 or e-mail: [hs@wiganmbc.gov.uk](mailto:hs@wiganmbc.gov.uk)

## Wigan & Leigh Housing

On 1<sup>st</sup> April the Government confirmed the allocation of a further £79m to bring all of the Council housing stock up to the decency level by 2008. This means that the total investment in Council housing will be more than £250m over five years. This is extra good news for tenants because the improvements will have no effect on rents. The details of the improvement programmes will be announced shortly.

Wigan and Leigh Housing have also achieved the target spend for the improvement programme in 2003/04. This means that the first tranche of additional monies (£58m) have been spent and this has resulted in over 4,000 new kitchens, structural repairs to nearly 4,000 properties, and 1,200 new roofs.

Changes to Homeless legislation in 2002 have led to a review of Wigan Council's Allocations Policy. The review has been led by WALH. A wide range of stakeholders and tenants have been involved in drafting the new policy, which expands applicant choice to 95% of WALH lettings. Formal consultation with tenants, applicants and RSL's begins in June. If you would like to comment on this or any other aspect of Council Housing in Wigan, please contact Michell Woodburn on 01942 827074 or e-mail: [m.woodburn@wiganmbc.gov.uk](mailto:m.woodburn@wiganmbc.gov.uk)

## Older People

### Innovation Forum

An initiative involving Wigan Council, the various parts of the Health Service and voluntary groups are looking to improve services available to older people.

Its prime focus is to prevent health problems and unnecessary hospital admissions for older people. It is seeking to do this by a combination of developing traditional hospital based services within the community, the Health Services and the Council working closely to reduce unco-ordinated visits and assessments, by also providing a greater choice of services and developing prevention policies that promote well being.

Clearly housing will need to play an important role in this initiative especially in providing a greater choice of services and in developing prevention policies. At its meeting in March the Older Persons Sub Group of the Housing Partnership discussed this initiative and agreed to look at the role housing could play. At its next meeting in June an action plan will be developed to take this initiative forward.

For further information, contact Peter Layland on 01942 404135 or e-mail: [p.layland@wiganmbc.gov.uk](mailto:p.layland@wiganmbc.gov.uk)

## Housing Partnership



The next Partnership Convention is to be held at 9 am on **Friday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2004** at the JJB Stadium in Wigan.

If you have not received an invitation and agenda, please contact the Housing Strategy Section on 01942 827074 or e-mail: [hs@wiganmbc.gov.uk](mailto:hs@wiganmbc.gov.uk)

## Wigan Homelessness Forum

The Wigan Homelessness Forum, was set up in 2002 tasked with producing the homelessness strategy. Since the publication of the strategy in April 2003, the role of the Forum has been the delivery of the objectives set out in that strategy. It has been instrumental in bringing together all the agencies involved with homelessness in the borough to produce real improvements in services for those who become, or are at risk of becoming homeless.

For further information, contact Steve Sargent on 01942 827702 or e-mail: [s.sargent@wiganmbc.gov.uk](mailto:s.sargent@wiganmbc.gov.uk)

## Independent Housing Advice Development Worker

When the Homelessness Strategy was produced in April 2003, it acknowledged the existence of good working relationships between agencies, but concluded "there was little evidence of a truly co-ordinated homelessness (advice) service". To address this, the C.A.B., Community Safety Team and Wigan & Leigh Housing jointly bid for funding to recruit a development worker early in 2003. Although the bid was successful, funding awarded by the Legal Services Commission and Refugee has only recently been released.

Fiona Pyott has now been recruited on a 3 year contract and will be taking up the post of "Independent Housing Advice Development Worker" in June. Although Fiona has not previously worked in Wigan, she has a track record of working in the advice, housing and support fields for various agencies. The primary role of the post will be to co-ordinate all the agencies involved in providing housing related advice and those which signpost to them. Fiona's first task will be to contact all the agencies to assess the range, level and quality of housing advice provision in the borough.

## Rough Sleepers

Through the early hours of the morning of the 21st April 2004, teams of volunteers from the partnership organisations took part in the Rough Sleepers Count, co-ordinated by the Council and overseen by the Rough Sleepers Unit.

8 Rough sleepers were found on the night plus a further 2 who had not bedded down. (Under strict government guidelines, only rough sleepers that have bedded down can be counted - those still wandering the streets are excluded from the count). This represents a one third reduction in the six months since the last count took place; only one of those found on the April count was included in the previous count and even he had been housed in the interim.

The Key Project, a new support service for rough sleepers, has been instrumental in helping people off the streets of Wigan. They focus their work on addressing the issues that lead to each individual becoming homeless and helping them (re)engage with services to bring about some stability in their lives. By tackling the causes of homelessness and then the symptoms, i.e. a lack of somewhere to live, the Key Project helps link some of the most excluded people in our society into more appropriate pathways of support and more sustainable housing solutions.

The Key Project is a good example of how multi-agency working has developed in the borough and how effective it can be. The project is funded through the Council and the Ashton, Wigan & Leigh PCT, administered by the C.A.B. and uses the Salvation Army as a base. Partners that form the steering group are Wigan & Leigh Housing, the PCT, C.A.B., Queens Hall Methodist Mission, Community Safety Team, Drugs Action Team and Housing Strategy.