



# HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Building the future together

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**Housing Partnership Newsletter**

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## **Changing Wigan Borough's Housing Strategy**

A key part of the work of the Housing Partnership is to develop an all-embracing Housing Strategy for the Borough, aimed at "Ensuring people have access to an affordable, decent home of choice in a good neighbourhood". Our current strategy was developed in early 2003 and was approved by government as being "fit for purpose". This strategy along with its Action Plan was due to be in place until 2007.

However, as agreed at previous Partnership meetings, it is now felt that the strategy would benefit from being updated due to the changed local housing market. It is therefore intended that by the Summer of 2005:

- A new statement about the current housing situation in Wigan will be produced.
- Strategies aimed at tackling housing problems in areas of less popular housing and specialist housing are to be revised.
- Affordable housing policies are to be developed
- A new Housing Strategy Action Plan is to be produced.

The aim is to present the proposed strategy changes at a meeting of the full Housing Partnership. Significant consultation already, and will continue to take place to discuss

the proposed enhancements to the strategy. To help us in this process, we are urgently looking to develop groups of Partnership members who can be consulted as we develop policies and action plans.

Ideally we will be looking to develop two specialist groups to consider the following topics:

- Tackling problems in areas of less popular housing
- Developing affordable housing

Whilst meetings may take place, we anticipate most of the work being conducted via e-mail, correspondence and telephone.

We also recognise that changes are needed in terms of specialist housing provision. However, it is intended that discussions in this area be directed through the existing sub-groups relating to Homelessness, Older People and Asylum Seekers.

If you would like to influence the future direction of the Strategy by becoming part of these groups, please contact: Steve Sargent on 01942 827702 or e-mail: [s.sargent@wiganmbc.gov.uk](mailto:s.sargent@wiganmbc.gov.uk)

We will also contact members directly, especially those with particular experience in these areas.

## Wigan's Housing Markets – feedback

You will remember that at the last Housing Partnership meeting, we focussed on discussing and guiding the research that was being carried out on Wigan's housing market.

Following this valuable input from the Partnership, the results of this research have now been published in a document: "Wigan's Changing Housing Market". This research is being used to inform proposed policy changes to the Housing Strategy itself.

Main findings from the research are:

- ❑ That the Wigan Borough is a distinct housing market with most of its residents having lived in the borough for a long time. There are relatively low levels of people wanting to leave the borough, or move into it from outside.
- ❑ Wigan's house prices are still considerably lower compared to regional prices despite the recent large increases.
- ❑ There is strong evidence of a widening gulf within the borough. Older township areas are often faced with lower than average house prices, falling population levels, poorer housing conditions and social issues such as high fear of crime. However, more peripheral townships have stronger housing markets with higher house prices and a broad choice of housing.

The main recommendations are: That the research confirms that Wigan's main housing problem continues to be the decline within the older housing areas, but recognises that affordability issues are also present within other areas. The report sets out a number of priority actions including the revision of the housing strategy.

A full copy of this research can be found on the following web page:  
[www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/research.htm](http://www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/research.htm)

## Wigan Borough Partnership Issues – an update

As you will no doubt be aware, the Housing Partnership is one of the thematic partnerships that contribute to the wider Wigan Borough Partnership (WBP).

Key news from this wider partnership includes:

- ❑ A major review has recently been undertaken and WBP is now in the final stages of developing a new Community Plan. This is a key document guiding overall partnership development. As part of this process, major consultation has taken place, culminating in the Partnership Convention that was held on 4th February 2005.



- ❑ Part of the new Community Plan will include being much clearer about what needs to be achieved. The Housing Partnership's contribution is continued in the goal to "Provide accessible decent homes in a safe, clean neighbourhood". The measures agreed at the last Housing Partnership meeting in December, that focused on affordability and housing conditions will be included.

If you would like to know more about the work of the Housing Partnership, please contact Peter Layland on 01942 41435 or e-mail: [p.layland@wiganmbc.gov.uk](mailto:p.layland@wiganmbc.gov.uk)

## A Bond Move



For many people, a significant barrier to accessing the private rented sector is the rental deposit that most private landlords require. This is charged to protect landlords against potential financial loss through damage or rent arrears. It can mean that those who are homeless, unemployed or on low incomes are unable to access private rented accommodation because they cannot afford the deposit, often a month's rent.

In order to enhance the accessibility of private rented housing in the borough, Wigan Council have provided funding to establish a bond scheme. The scheme will be administered by the Citizens Advice Bureau for Wigan Homelessness Forum and managed by the Independent Housing Advice Development Worker.

An officer, Louise Atherton, has been recruited in a dual role to jointly administer the scheme and improve housing literacy in the borough. Her role will be to liaise with private landlords and applicants looking to access private rented accommodation. She will also carry out housing literacy work to those most at risk of homelessness. This will involve targeting those groups and carrying out sessions in, for example, schools and prisons, with the aim of preventing homelessness.

Through the scheme, a bond will be offered to private landlords in the form of a written guarantee. This will mean that any money owed from the bond to landlords at the end of the tenancy will be paid. The scheme intends to enter into partnership with a credit union to encourage and promote a savings element and enhance social inclusion.

A criterion for acceptance onto the scheme is that a tenant will open a credit union account and make regular payments. Any savings made will be held against the bond until the end of the tenancy. If no claim is made against the bond, savings will be made available to the tenant.

It is envisaged that the Bond Guarantee Scheme will be operational in the next few months. If you would like to know more about the scheme, are interested in taking part or keen to provide additional funding, please contact Louise Atherton on: 01942 267963 or e-mail: [louise.atherton@wiganhomelessnessforum.org.uk](mailto:louise.atherton@wiganhomelessnessforum.org.uk)

## Rough Sleepers Count 2005



In the next few weeks, Wigan Council will be undertaking a head count of rough sleepers in the borough. The aim of the count is purely to identify the numbers sleeping rough on any one night, it is not intended to measure the extent of homelessness (or those who are of No Fixed Abode) in the borough.

As the count will take place on a single night, we need to gather as much information as possible ahead of the night of the count to ensure everyone that does sleep rough is counted.

We do have quite good information about Wigan Town Centre, but very little information about any other parts of the borough. If you are aware of any sites where people sleep rough or have been known to sleep rough in the past please e-mail us at: [hs@wiganmbc.gov.uk](mailto:hs@wiganmbc.gov.uk)

## Abram & Platt Bridge Renewal Areas Declared



The older housing areas at Platt Bridge and Abram have now been formally declared as Renewal Areas. This will mean that the Council can concentrate action within these areas and will allow the use of additional powers, vital to bring about community change and infrastructure improvement.

It is expected that the Council will invest around £4M over the next 5 years within the area. Initially, we will concentrate on environmental and infrastructure issues. Ultimately we will be looking to improve both the appearance and condition of housing. Whilst this work mainly involves the 1,500 private houses in the area, links will be made to the improvements being made to Wigan & Leigh Housing

The declaration of Housing Renewal Areas in Platt Bridge and Abram follows major preparatory work including stock condition surveys, resident involvement, combined with independent research on the state of the local housing market. This information has been compiled in a declaration report which showed that almost 40% of the housing in the area was either unfit or in poor condition, and nearly 30% of households were in receipt of means-tested benefit. Clearly, as work begins in this area, further resident involvement will take place.

The Council is keen to echo its' past successes in improving housing markets, such as has taken place in other parts of the Borough, such as Pagefield. For further information see:

[www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/abram.htm](http://www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/abram.htm)

## Health Minister Visits Local Homelessness Projects

A team of six Government Health Ministers visited the North West in January 2005, to see first hand some of the innovative health developments taking place in the area.

Lord Warner visited two homelessness projects in the Wigan borough where a Specialist Health Visitor works alongside other agencies to provide support to homeless people and families:

- Lord Warner first visited the Key Project, based at the Queens Hall where he helped prepare and serve breakfasts to Rough Sleepers. The Key Project is a joint initiative funded by Wigan Council and Ashton, Leigh & Wigan PCT that works with rough sleepers in the Wigan area to access services and overcome problems, helping them prepare to eventually be able to obtain and manage their own tenancy.
- Lord Warner then moved on to Tiernan Lodge, where he met project staff and the residents. Tiernan Lodge provides temporary and emergency accommodation for individuals and families who have become homeless for a variety of reasons.

Homeless people face great inequalities in accessing health services, yet their health often suffers from being homeless or living in poor accommodation; poor health can also be the cause of homelessness in the first place. In recognition of this, Ashton, Wigan & Leigh PCT employ a "Specialist Health Visitor for the Homeless and Vulnerable People" who plays a vital role in addressing the many and varied health needs of those who become homeless in the borough.

For further information on the work of the Key Project, please contact Steve Sargent on 01942 827702 or e-mail:

[s.sargent@wiganmbc.gov.uk](mailto:s.sargent@wiganmbc.gov.uk)

## Help on the way for Borough's homeless



Wigan's Homelessness Forum has just won a massive £630,000 grant from the Chancellor, Gordon Brown.

The good news is the result of a successful bid by the Forum, to help groups that up to now have been excluded from mainstream homeless services, such as single people and rough sleepers. The money is for a three year period.

In recent years homelessness has rocketed in the borough. Over 3,000 people sought help from the council last year - a 65% rise in five years - but only a third of these were legally entitled to housing.

Wigan's Homelessness Forum was set up in 2003 and has already made real progress towards improving services for homeless people, including:

- ❑ Additional "Move-on" accommodation for homeless people
- ❑ A scheme that helps rough sleepers to access mainstream services and manage their own accommodation
- ❑ An independent housing advice project across the borough
- ❑ A 'rent deposit scheme' being launched shortly to make it easier for homeless people to get private rented accommodation.

News of the government grant was welcomed by housing bosses. Wigan Council's Community Protection Director, Bob Saunders, speaking as chairman of the Homelessness Forum, said he was delighted that its work had been recognised.

He said: "It means we will be able to provide better assistance to those people not currently able to access homeless services, particularly single homeless people and rough sleepers.

"The money will particularly be used to run a direct access accommodation project in the borough, for which £1.25M funding to build has already been awarded. It will allow us to make a real difference and continue to work together to provide effective help for homeless residents."

## Any News?



Do you have any news or information that is relevant to the Housing Partnership and this newsletter? If so, we would like to include your article in future editions. Please contact Michelle Feeney on 01942 486789 or e-mail: [m.feeney@wiganmbc.gov.uk](mailto:m.feeney@wiganmbc.gov.uk)

## STOP PRESS! Other news in Brief

- ❑ **House Condition Survey**  
The Council has commissioned a House Condition Survey of the Borough. Results will help inform our strategies and will be available in May 2005.
- ❑ **Wigan & Leigh Housing**  
Wigan & Leigh Housing have just undergone a full inspection by the Audit Commission. The results from this inspection will be available in May 2005.
- ❑ **Supporting People Strategy**  
Wigan's new Supporting People Strategy has now been drafted and is available for on-going consultation and comments on the "Homelessness Forum" link of the following website:  
[www.wiganhomelessnessforum.org.uk](http://www.wiganhomelessnessforum.org.uk)

Your next issue of the Housing Partnership newsletter will focus in detail on the contents of the strategy.