

**Environmental Services Department
Housing Strategy Team
Gateway House, Standishgate, Wigan, WN1 1AE**

Tel: 01942 828952 **Fax:** 01942 828959
E-mail: hst@wigan.gov.uk
Website: www.wigan.gov.uk/Services/Housing/HousingStrategyPolicy/

Issue 11

Housing Partnership Newsletter

July 2009

Housing Strategy Article

The new Housing Strategy for the Wigan Borough is nearing its completion.

Housing Partnership members will recall the launch of the Housing Issues Paper at its meeting in February 2009 at Leigh Sports Village. However, much has happened since then and we are now at a position where we are seeking political approval of the strategy.

February and March saw a large consultation exercise take place. A summary version of the Issues Paper together with a questionnaire was available via the Councils website for members of the public to respond to. In addition to this key stakeholders, resident focus groups and housing related networks were also asked about the Housing Issues paper and asked to complete the questionnaire.

Furthermore the Housing Strategy team used the Partnerships and Communities Together (PACT) process for the first time. This is where residents of particular wards of the Borough are consulted with on a range of topical issues. Each ward of the Borough will be visited on programme at least once every 12 months. Residents of a total of 10 wards in the Borough (mainly in the Leigh, Orrell & Winstanley and Ashton areas) were consulted with on the Housing Issues paper and feedback obtained.

The results of the Housing Issues paper were then used to develop a draft Housing Strategy which we consulted on with key stakeholders & interested residents during June 2009.

Comments made during this shorter period of consultation have been used to amend the draft strategy and action plan. This is now being offered for approval and adoption via the local decision making bodies.

The strategy was reported to the Economy, Environment Cultural & Housing (EECH) Partnership board on the 2nd July where it was approved. The strategy will now be reported to the EECH Scrutiny Committee in late July and Cabinet in August.

Once approved the strategy will be available on the Housing Strategy web pages and a small number of hard copies will be printed off and available.

Finally a full meeting of the Housing Partnership will be arranged, around September / October 2009, to formally launch the strategy.

For more information please contact Angela Durkin on 01942 828953 or A.Durkin@wigan.gov.uk



HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Comeback for Council Houses

New council homes are returning to Wigan after an absence of more than twenty years.

Wigan and Leigh Housing, which manages the council's 23,000 properties, has been given the green light to build a £6 million development in Scholes.

Supported by the council, Wigan and Leigh Housing successfully attracted nearly £3 million of grant towards the scheme, on a former demolition site at Kay Close, and building work is set to start in the autumn. Council chiefs are hopeful it will be the first of a number of new developments of council housing across the borough.



The scheme will include 42 two bedroom apartments and ten two bedroom houses and it received planning permission earlier this month.

The development is being funded by the council and the Homes and Communities Agency (formerly the Housing Corporation) and will be owned and managed by Wigan and Leigh Housing.

The company says it will be looking for contractors who are committed to using local labour and work with it on innovative training schemes.

Ashley Crumbley, chief executive of Wigan and Leigh Housing, said: "This is great news for Scholes and the local construction industry.

"A recent housing survey highlighted the growing demand for quality housing for older people. The location of the site close to the town centre offers an ideal opportunity to meet these needs.

"The provision of two bedroom houses will compliment our older persons' apartments and the existing three bedroom properties in the locality and help us tackle under occupancy within larger family properties."

The news follows hot on the heels of recent investment including £2.1 million environmental improvements to the 'Scholes Village' and £5 million ongoing improvement works to the multi storey blocks.

The last homes built by Wigan Council were in Hindley Green in 1985. Since then changes in government policy, 'right to buy' rules which saw thousands of council houses sold off and a drop in demand for social housing has led to an effective moratorium on all new building.

But all that changed last year when Wigan & Leigh Housing won council approval to look at options for delivering new housing last April and developed a 10 year business model which, depending on funding, will aim to provide 866 affordable homes, including 691 for rent over a 10 year period.

Initially, the company says it is looking to only build homes for rent. However it has plans to provide homes for sale when the housing market becomes more stable.

Mr Crumbley added: "We are currently working with the council to identify sites to allow more new homes to be built."

Local Development Framework

Most people reading this will have already received notice of the LDF Core Strategy preferred options consultation. For those who have and for those who have not, the article below is a reminder that the period for sending in responses to the council closes on **4 August 2009**.

Wigan Council has prepared a Core Strategy Preferred Options document for consultation as part of the Local Development Framework. This is the second 'formal' stage in the preparation of the Core Strategy and is available to view and comment on between **9 June** and **4 August 2009**.

The document is *still* not a draft plan setting out the council's proposals. It is a document that sets out our preferences for wide consideration and debate and, among other things, deals with all aspects of new housing provision through to 2026. We believe that the options outlined in the document will best address the issues we face and help transform Wigan Borough for the better. The views we receive will inform us in producing our proposed plan at the next stage, the 'pre-submission' stage scheduled for mid 2010.

We would like your views on the Preferred Options. There are a number of questions throughout the document that we would like you to consider and respond to if you wish. Hopefully they are broad enough for you to let us know your views, whatever it is that you wish to tell us.

The Preferred Options focus around five areas and eight sites that are set out in the main document. You will probably be most interested in the sites and areas near where you live. More specific mention of Housing matters appear in the Housing core policy principle Policy CP5 (*found on page 131 in the main document or following paragraph 10.74 in the online version and in paragraphs 10.75 to 10.92*).

As well as the Preferred Options Report, we have prepared a number of supporting documents including a leaflet, 13 Topic Papers, one of which relates to Housing, and a series of local studies.

There are various ways you can view these documents and submit your responses. You can access these documents online, at our offices and at local libraries.

To view and download all documents and submit comments online, go to our website at www.wigan.gov.uk/ldfcorestrategy

From there, click on 'Core Strategy Preferred Options'.

If you have already registered with our online consultation service you should also receive an email through the Limehouse consultation software to notify you about this consultation. If you have not registered and would like to, please visit the Core Strategy Preferred Options webpage and click on the 'online consultation' link.

Alternatively you can view all documents and submit comments by contacting us in writing to Martin Kimber, Executive Director of Environmental Services FREEPOST NWW5378, Civic Buildings, New Market Street, Wigan WN1 1RP or visit us in person at the address above.

You can also view the documents at all borough **libraries, Wigan Town Hall, Leigh Town Hall and Gateway House**, Standishgate, Wigan.

You can also submit comments by email to planningpolicy@wigan.gov.uk

If you live in the borough look out for the summary leaflet within the June edition of 'Borough Life'.

Please get your comments to us by **4 August 2009**

We are also consulting on our Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment over the same period. The primary role of this assessment is to identify sites with potential for housing, to assess their housing potential and estimate when they are likely to be developed.

The assessment is not a statement of Council policy; it will provide baseline information to inform the ongoing preparation of the Core Strategy and future local development documents, but does not in itself allocate sites for housing development.

Both the initial assessment report and the schedule of sites are available to view on the Council's website www.wigan.gov.uk and in paper format at the Council's Civic Buildings office on New Market Street in Wigan town centre.

If you would like any further information please contact Martin Stuart on 01942 404238 but please note that we cannot record your comments on the phone or in person.

Landlord Prosecution

A private landlord who gained entry and changed the locks to one of his properties without following the correct legal process to terminate a tenancy had made his tenant homeless.

Jason Smith, of Bolton Road in Ashton in Makerfield was unlawfully evicted on Friday 8th May 2009 after his landlord changed the locks whilst he was out. Earlier that day a representative of the landlord had let himself into Mr Smith's property and threatened to remove him.

Mr Smith received a phone call whilst he was out to inform him that his locks had been changed and when he arrived home the property agent refused to hand over any keys and Mr Smith was forced to contact his solicitor, Michelle Stevenson of Stephenson Solicitors LLP.

Michelle obtained a High Court injunction which compelled Mr Smith's landlord to allow immediate re-admittance to his home but the Landlord chose to ignore this.

Whilst his Solicitors worked on his case Jason spent the following week staying with friends and family, sleeping on their sofas until Wigan Council's Housing Strategy Team were made aware of the situation and were able to provide Mr Smith with temporary accommodation whilst the legal process continued.

Following a successful court hearing at Liverpool's Civil Court the landlord finally gave Jason his keys back allowing him to return home 11 days after his eviction. The landlord was sentenced to a 28 days in prison, suspended for 12 months and has been forced to pay the legal costs. If the landlord makes any further breaches to the injunction their company assets will be sequestrated.

Stephenson Solicitors were supported in court by staff from Wigan Council and Wigan and Leigh Housing and they have continued to support Jason since.

Unfortunately cases like this are on the increase and only go to highlight how badly landlords who fail to follow the correct legal processes can and do treat their tenants.

Wigan Council, Wigan and Leigh Housing and Stephenson Solicitors will continue to work in partnership together providing advice and support to private sector tenants and offering guidance to private landlords to try and ensure good management practice in the private rented sector.

For further information please contact Jen Martlew on 01942 488478 or email Jennifer.martlew@wigan.gov.uk

Landlord Accreditation

Wigan Council, in response to requests from local landlords, are setting up a new landlord accreditation scheme. The scheme, which will be managed by the Council's Housing Strategy Team, will be specifically aimed at landlords operating throughout the Wigan Borough.

It will be free to join and a whole host of benefits will become available to landlords throughout the course of the year. Benefits being considered are:

- A Good Practice resource guide which will contain examples of tenancy agreements, notices, how to tackle anti-social behaviour and other key management areas
- Training sessions for landlords
- Advice from a named officer within the Council.
- Access to the Council's forthcoming Private Sector Leasing Scheme
- Access to the Bond Scheme
- Access to a low cost Housing Management Service
- Discounted Gas, Electrical, Energy Performance checks
- Discounted insurance

- Discounted repairs and maintenance service
- Advertising of vacant properties through the Property Shops
- Access to a network of landlords through the Wigan Borough Landlords Forum

SHIP 2009



Steve Martlew, Senior Housing Policy Officer with Wigan Council says “We are responding to requests from local landlords who have told us quite clearly they want a scheme based in Wigan. We want the many Wigan landlords who offer a good standard of property with a good management service to be recognised.

We also know that letting a property for the first time can be a daunting task so we want to be able to help new or inexperienced landlords so that they can get it right first time.”

The scheme will operate with landlords completing an application form and providing appropriate certification. Following this a sample of the landlord’s properties will be inspected to ensure that they comply with Housing Health & Safety legislation.

Steve goes on to say

“We are hopeful that the many landlords operating in the Wigan area will see the benefits of joining our scheme and gaining the recognition they deserve. Whilst some of the benefits we hope to offer are not in place yet, we will be working on them throughout the summer and hope to be able to offer a full range of benefits by the autumn of this year.”

If you are interested in joining the Wigan Landlord Accreditation Scheme please contact Michelle Price on 01942 828806 or Jen Martlew on 01942 488478

<http://www.wigan.gov.uk/Services/Housing/HousingStrategyPolicy/Landlord+Accreditation+Scheme.htm>

This years SHIP event, held at Formby Hall, Atherton on 3rd June, has been hailed as a huge success by all who attended. Over 150 older people came from across the borough and enjoyed an afternoon of entertainment and competitions, including bingo games, Chair Based Exercise with the Active Living Team and dancing with the Sunshine Ladies and the Formby Hall sequence dancers.

As well as being an opportunity to meet friends and have some fun, the event offered a chance to find out more about the services on offer in the borough for the over 50s. There were over 30 agencies and services represented and those attending were able to pick up information on a wide range of topics including sheltered housing, pension entitlement, making their homes safer ,healthy eating and exercise.

The Sheltered Housing and Information Partnership would like to thank all those who attended and all the volunteers who helped to make the afternoon such a success, and hope to see you next year.



Allocations Review

Wigan Council's allocations policy determines who gets a Council property. It sets out how we recognise different kinds of housing need and therefore what priority people have when they are applying for a tenancy. We have to work within some strict statutory requirements and to national guidance, but we also have to balance this with the local needs of our borough and the strategic objectives we have set ourselves to tackle local housing problems and homelessness. The main impetus for the current review was that the demand for social housing has increased massively in recent years, at the same time that fewer properties are becoming available, and so people generally have to wait a lot longer for a property than in the past. People with low priority in the allocations system are not likely ever to get a tenancy, so we need to make sure that people's needs are assessed fairly.

Wigan & Leigh Housing have been leading a working group composed of staff, elected Members and tenant representatives, to develop a new structure for the housing register. The proposals include reducing the number of priority groups, new ways to reflect situations where people have multiple needs as well as how long they have been waiting; and supporting people with a good tenancy record who need to move, but making it harder for people who have caused problems in the neighbourhood to get a Council tenancy unless they can show

that they are improving their behaviour. It is also important that the priority scheme helps people move-on from temporary accommodation when they need to and - since family homes are in such short supply - to encourage people to move out of large houses they no longer need, if they are happy to move into something smaller.

A report outlining the framework of proposals was approved by Wigan & Leigh Housing's Board on 7th July. Housing Strategy will now work with WALH to fine-tune the proposals and to consult with our partners in housing and related services. The outcomes of this consultation will be fed into a proposed new policy we hope to be able to submit to EECH Scrutiny Committee towards the end of the year. In order to develop an allocations policy that is fair and workable, it will be vital to include contributions from our partners and we look forward to getting your feedback over the next few months.

For more information contact Helen Taylor on 01942 828970 or H.Taylor@wigan.gov.uk

New Support Services For Older People

Older residents in the borough are set to benefit from an increase in support services over the next two years. Housing Strategy and Supporting People officers are working with providers to develop services that offer more choice and flexibility to older people, enabling them to remain living independently in their own homes for longer.

From April the Council has expanded the successful Assistive Technology service to provide up to an additional 1200 community alarms to those with low level needs who do not qualify for a service funded through the Social Care budget. Referrals can be made via Age Concern Starting Point or directly to the Assistive Technology team based within Adult Services. Upon referral, staff carry out a full needs assessment. They can refer to other services, such as the Home Improvement Agency, where needed, as well as providing access to the alarm and

emergency response service. In addition, over 90 additional units of floating/resettlement support are available for older people regardless of where they live or which tenure they live in through support services provided by Wigan and Leigh Housing and Age Concern.

We have also commissioned a number of pilot schemes trialling new models of service provision. These include the Brown Court Hub and Spoke project, see the May 08 Newsletter, and the two projects outlined below.

These measures will contribute to the commitment outlined in the Supporting People Commissioning Framework 2008-11 to increase the funding and develop services for older people and to make services available across all tenures.

For more information contact Angela Durkin, Senior Housing Policy Officer, 01942 828953 or a.durkin@wigan.gov.uk

Wigan and Leigh Housing - Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator



The Health and Wellbeing Scheme is a 12 month pilot project co-ordinated by Wigan and Leigh Housing and funded by Supporting People. The project aims to further increase the quality of life of older people across all tenures in the Hag Fold and Atherton area through the development of a programme of stimulating events and activities and by working in partnership with other agencies. The service has been set up to:

- offer a range of different organised social activities and events which are aimed at increasing enjoyment, leisure and learning opportunities.
- offer healthy living initiatives such as exercise
- provide information to older people on staying safe and secure within their homes to reduce the risk of accidents and increase their independence.
- offer opportunities to older people to get involved and make a positive contribution.
- ensure that people are receiving the benefits they are entitled to by working with advice agencies in the Wigan area

For more information please contact Andrea Pugh, Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator Tel/Fax: 01942 882732 or E-mail: andrea.pugh@walh.co.uk

Arena Options – Older Person's Independence Support Worker



Arena Options have joined in a partnership with Supporting People to pilot a new service in the Wigan Borough.

The Independence worker will support vulnerable people over the age of 55 with complex needs. This may include people experiencing homelessness, low level mental health conditions, low level learning disabilities, alcohol or drug misuse or chaotic lifestyles.

The service will promote independence and well-being. This may include support to:

- Achieve financial wellbeing and maximise income
- Access leisure and cultural activities
- Better manage their physical health

- Manage their substance or alcohol misuse issues
- Maintain or gain accommodation
- To promote personal safety

The Independency worker will agree a package of support that may include

- Home Visits
- Regular telephone contact
- Advocacy
- Referral to specialist agencies
- Accompanied visits and appointments
- Accessing social opportunities
- Assistance with securing accommodation
- Community alarm service

The service is funded by a Supporting People contract. This means that depending on your income and eligibility you may be able to receive a subsidy to pay for the service.

The service can be accessed via referral form please contact:

Phil Campbell 07879 488113
 2 Spring Street, Ince, Wigan, WN3 4TW
pcambell@arena-housing.com

Bickershaw Site Improvements



The improvements to the Bickershaw caravan site are well underway. The Council was successful in obtaining a grant to carry out some improvements in 2008.

The perimeter fencing and entrance gates have been replaced/improved. These provide greater security to residents as well as helping better management of who come onto the site.



Works to improve drainage, resurfacing, delineation of pitches etc. will begin in July 2009.

For more information contact Steve Martlew on 01942 488477 or S.Martlew@wigan.gov.uk

Housing Partnership Newsletter

The Newsletter is designed to keep all members of the Housing Partnership up to date with developments within the Housing world here in Wigan.

If you have any interesting articles for future editions please contact Steve Martlew on 01942 488477 or S.Martlew@wigan.gov.uk

Remember other up dates on Housing issues are available on the Housing Strategy web pages

<http://www.wigan.gov.uk/Services/Housing/HousingStrategyPolicy/>