



HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Building the future together

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Issue 1 Housing Partnership Newsletter Nov 2003



READ ALL ABOUT IT!

This is the first Newsletter of the Housing Partnership. It has been produced as part of the Partnership Review and is aimed at keeping all individuals and groups interested in housing up-to-date with news and progress. It is hoped that the Newsletter will be produced at least twice a year and we welcome contributions from all the members of the Partnership.

The Housing Partnership was created in 1999 and is one of seven partnerships that have helped create the Community Plan for Wigan. Its membership is drawn from statutory and non-statutory agencies, the private sector, voluntary groups and individuals who have a common interest in housing. The Partnership looks to develop the overall Housing Strategy for the Borough that covers both the public and private sectors and debates policy challenges to the Strategy.

Future of the Partnership

The Partnership will meet at least twice a year and would include all its members. The first event in May will discuss the strategic changes needed to tackle problems and a follow-up event in Autumn would review past strategies and evaluate new information so as to inform debate. A smaller Consultative Group would be formed, which would participate in developing the Partnership's views on specific Government and other housing developments. It is envisaged that most of the work of this group would be carried out without the need for formal meetings.

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Housing Strategy

Wigan Council's Housing Strategy aims:

"To ensure people have access to an affordable, decent home of choice in a good neighbourhood."

The strategic objectives are:

On "access to affordable homes":

- In the social rented sector, at least 85% of homeless people to be resettled within one year and, from 2004/05, a year-on-year reduction in the numbers of homeless people.
- In the private sector, the average annual household income to be more than two-fifths of the average price of an older terraced house.

On "decent homes":

- In the social rented sector, all homes to meet the Government's "Decency Standard" by 2010.
- In the private sector, no more than 2% of homes to be unfit and no more than 10% to have a poor energy efficiency rating ("SAP" below 40) by 2010.

On "good neighbourhoods":

- In both the social rented and private sectors, the number of empty homes to be less than 2% by 2007.

A copy of the Housing Strategy is available together with our other housing related strategies on our website:

www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/strategies.htm

Asylum Seekers Forum

The Asylum Seekers Providers Forum meets quarterly and is responsible for co-ordinating the distribution, support and integration of asylum seekers in the Borough.

The Forum's membership includes representatives from: Advice Agencies, Council, Health Services, Housing Providers, NASS, Police, Probation Service, Religious Groups and Voluntary Groups. Asylum seekers and refugees are also welcome to attend.

For more information on asylum seekers and refugees, please see our website:



www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/asylum.htm

Energy Efficiency

The Greater Manchester South Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (GMS EEAC) provides a free, impartial and locally relevant energy efficiency advice service to the residents in the Wigan Borough area.

They can be contacted on freephone **0800 512012**

For more information on energy efficiency, please see our website:



www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/ee.htm

Homelessness Forum

The Homelessness Forum was formed in January 2002 to develop Wigan's Homelessness Strategy. It comprises a wide range of service providers, voluntary agencies and other stakeholders who all combined to develop the Strategy entitled "A Place for Me", which was completed in April 2003.

The Forum now meets on a quarterly basis. Of its tasks, two are particularly challenging – trying to implement the Strategy in the face of a rapidly rising number of homeless people and trying to cope with the increasing problem of street homelessness. An official count in October found 12 rough sleepers in the Borough. This represents one of the ten worst areas in the country. Bob Saunders said, "The increase has happened very quickly - only a year ago the head count was more like one or two." The Forum has helped co-ordinate a number of new initiatives including the Key project, a support service for rough sleepers. A copy of the Homeless Strategy can be found at;

www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/strategies.htm

Home Security

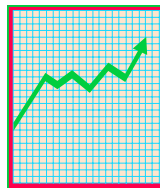
The Housing Strategy Section provides useful advice on home security. For more information, please see our website:



www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/security.htm

Housing Research

The Housing Strategy section commissions research on various housing issues, such as homelessness studies, house condition surveys, housing needs surveys and housing market monitoring. Copies of these research reports can be found on our website:



www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/research.htm

Older Persons Forum

The Older Persons Forum was set up to identify the main issues impacting on the quality of life of older people living in their own home and to ensure these issues were addressed fairly, efficiently and effectively. It also monitors the performance of Wigan's Care & Repair agency. The Forum meets every quarter and members include representatives from: Age Concern, Care & Repair, Council, County Palatine Housing Association, Greater Manchester Police, Pension Service, Pensioners Link, Social Services, Victim Support and Wigan & Leigh Housing. Older people are also invited to attend. There are currently 3 smaller working groups dealing with issues that have been highlighted as major concerns for older people – awareness of services, community safety matters and handyperson / gardening type projects. These will be progressed over the next few months.

Urban Renewal

On 18 July this year, the Government abolished the legislation relating to the grant system and introduced a new framework that allows each Council to set its own policy to meet local needs. We have worked up a new policy, which is far more suited to Wigan's situation. Under the new policy, we will be able to offer two main forms of Housing Assistance:

Home Fitness Assistance – This type of assistance is targeted at unfit homes occupied by vulnerable, low income, owner occupied households. It is used for essential works to make a property fit for occupation, plus certain home security measures.

Renewal Area Assistance – This type of assistance is used for renovating the external structure and appearance of homes in Renewal Areas.

Our programme of environmental improvements to compliment the housing improvements will continue as before. Our new policy means we can give more emphasis to the issues that concern residents most, such as crime.

For more information about Housing Assistance, please see our website:



www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/assistance.htm

WALH Monitoring

Council homes account for 21% of all housing in the Borough. They have a crucial role in our Boroughwide Housing Strategy. Wigan and Leigh Housing Ltd (“WALH”) are the Arms Length Management Organisation (“ALMO”) set up by the Council in April 2002 to manage the Council's 25,500 homes. They are also responsible for spending an additional £58.3m initial credit approval to ensure our homes meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

Housing Strategy monitor WALH's performance and we have jointly agreed a set of Performance Indicators. We also carry out in-depth reviews of specific service areas. We are working closely with WALH to develop a housing service that not only meets the needs of residents but also exceeds their expectations. We are committed to WALH becoming a 3-star organisation that continually seeks to improve the housing service it delivers to all stakeholders.

For more information about the monitoring of Wigan and Leigh Housing, please see our website:



www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/ehcp/eh/housing/almo.htm

Who's Who

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We would positively welcome contributions to future editions of the newsletter from members of the Housing Partnership. Please contact Anees Mank or any member of the Housing Strategy Team.