

# Vision 2026

## Housing Strategy

### Mid Year Update



NOVEMBER 2011

#### VISION— QUANTITY

Wigan is a place with a range of good quality, affordable housing that meets the aspirations of residents and supports sustainable growth

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## Completion of the new build programme

Working in partnership with Wigan and Leigh Housing, we have recently completed the final development in our first new build affordable housing programme. All properties have been delivered on time and with a total programme cost of £11m, a 15% reduction on the original estimated costs. In the last two years we have secured £5.5m of grant funding from the Homes and Communities agency and have built 105 new homes bringing six vacant sites across the borough back into use.

The homes have all been built to Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 and are a mix of units ranging from apartments for the over 55s to 4 bedroom family houses. All homes have

been let to applicants on the housing register and we have introduced a local lettings policy for all new build schemes that has successfully ensured a mix of residents. At a time of reduced housing completions, our programme,



Kay Close, Scholes 1998 and 2011



along with other investment in affordable homes has made a considerable contribution to delivery over the last two years, with affordable housing completions being 36% of completions in 2010/11 compared to just 5% of completions in 2008/09. The programme has also contributed to sustaining employment and skills in construction in the borough.

The Orchards, Leigh



## Launch of new shared equity homes

The Housing Strategy team has recently revised its affordable housing scheme with the intention of more residents in the borough being able to purchase affordable homes. Following consultation with developers and lenders we have now launched a new shared equity model. Under the scheme, the Council will offer an equity loan of, for

example, 30% of the property value. Purchasers will be required to come up with a minimum 5% deposit and obtain a conventional mortgage from a high street lender for the remainder of the purchase price. The Council's equity loan will be non-interest bearing and only repayable after ten years or should the property be sold.

Shared equity homes have now been launched at Redrow's new development at College Gardens, Newtown with prices starting from £69,995 and we are working with other developers to offer shared equity homes at other sites shortly.

## FirstBuy help available at Wigan housing developments



FirstBuy Roadshow comes to Wigan Town Centre

Wigan has attracted First-Buy funding from the Homes and Communities Agency to support first time buyers in getting a foot on the housing ladder on several new housing developments across the borough.

As part of the local marketing strategy Plumlife, the local home buy agency a roadshow was held in Wigan Town Centre on 10<sup>th</sup> September, where representatives from developers Barratt, Miller Homes, Morris

Homes, Persimmon Homes and Redrow Homes were on hand along with staff from Plumlife to give prospective purchasers details of the scheme and the developments on offer.



Before and after



## Tackling empty homes

A house in Leigh had been empty since 2008 and was a source of numerous complaints from local residents and ward councillors. The house had to be secured on over 20 occasions and the police were regularly called out to deal with the anti-social behaviour

and crime taking place in and around it.

The Private Sector Housing Team produced a schedule of works and offered the owner a loan to finance them. This offer was rejected, so we put the owner in touch with a company interested in purchasing the house. This too was

rejected, so we set a deadline for the owner to bring the house back into use otherwise we would initiate Compulsory Purchase action. This threat persuaded the owner to completely renovate the house and it is currently on the market to let.

## What we'll be doing next

Developing more help for first time buyers to access the market – we have identified a gap in offering support to first time buyers looking to purchase in the second hand market but who are struggling to access a mortgage due to the requirement for a large deposit.

Looking to work with developers to bring forward key sites that contribute to wider regeneration plans eg. Pemberton Colliery and Bickershaw South.

Working up our schemes for the AHP 2011-15 – we will be working with our partner Registered Providers to identify potential developments in priority areas.

Finalising our “Affordable Housing Guidance Note” for developers – this will offer more guidance on delivering affordable homes through planning obligations.

Bringing the Local Development Framework up to adoption stage by summer 2012.

Looking at developing a wider range of options to tackle empty homes.

# Improving the quality of private rented homes



## Before and after

with more energy efficient models, 70 properties have improved loft insulation, 8 properties have been fully refurbished and 11 humidity control

fans have been fitted to prevent dampness.

The improvements being made to the private rented stock by LLs are having an impact on the local economy with an estimated figure of £150k being spent on refurbishments/removal of Category 1 hazards/improvements to the lettable standard.

Other outcomes achieved—

- Now have established contact with over 600 private landlords across the borough and holding well attended landlords forum

- Through the Landlord Accreditation scheme and leasing scheme over 120 Category 1 hazards have been removed



- Wigan Housing Solutions have earned £26k in fee income from April to September 2011 through managing and leasing more properties and have secured £34k in funding from Crisis

- 5 properties empty for more than 12 months have now been leased by the Council, 2 of which were empty for more than 2 years

- First training session on managing rent arrears delivered to Landlords.

There are now 33 accredited Landlords in the Borough with over 205 properties between them. By working with and offering support to Landlords via the accreditation scheme and private sector leasing scheme Landlords are voluntarily improving a percentage of their property portfolio to a higher standard.

Through the 193 detailed property improvement plans produced over 125 Category 1 hazards have been removed, 10 central heating systems have been replaced

**VISION -  
QUALITY**

**All areas of the borough are attractive places to live with neighbourhoods that are safe, clean and inclusive.**

## Leigh Neighbours Project

The Leigh Neighbours Area consists of a large number of pavement fronted two-up two-down terraced houses in long streets near the centre of Leigh. The area had fallen into low demand, which resulted in a large increase in the number of empty and poorly managed privately rented homes.

We encouraged several landlords to engage Wigan Housing Solutions, a professional not-for-profit letting agency, to undertake the management of their properties to a much higher standard. The council now lease 4 properties in the area.

Examples of high profile cases include one where we supported a landlord in taking repossession action against tenants who were causing persistent anti social behaviour, one where we issued a Compulsory Purchase Order to bring a long-term empty house back into use and one where we prosecuted two regional landlords for failing to comply with our Improvement Notices.

Full details of these high profile prosecutions were published in the following newspaper report: [http://www.leighjournal.co.uk/news/8910259.Landlords\\_fined/](http://www.leighjournal.co.uk/news/8910259.Landlords_fined/)

[news/8910259.Landlords\\_fined/](http://www.leighjournal.co.uk/news/8910259.Landlords_fined/)

This publicity led to the landlords being featured in an hour long Channel 4 Dispatches documentary on "Landlords from Hell", which is still available to view online.



**Terrace properties typical of the Leigh Neighbours area**

## New Care and Repair Home Improvement Agency

From 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011, the delivery of practical help in the home to older people has changed. We have appointed Manchester Care & Repair (MC&R) to deliver these "home improvement agency" (HIA) services.

The new service is known as **Wigan Borough Care & Repair** and was launched at the September "Full of Life" events.

The new service gives

Wigan residents

A new **free** home improvement agency service which will provide support with arranging home repairs and adaptations through a building contractor

An advice and assistance service which will help older people benefit from easier access to services and welfare benefits

A handyman service costing only £15 per visit

And...

The borough will use this service to deliver all the "minor adaptations" it provides for local residents in the private sector



The Handyman service for small repairs



## What we'll be doing next

Looking at new ways to help improve private sector homes in view of cuts to the housing renewal budget.

Promoting the green deal and working with landlords to take advantage/encourage uptake of the green deal ahead of the introduction of regulations in 2016 and 2018.

Lettings and other networking opportunities.

We know that the work we do improves quality of life, generates further investment and employment opportunities and saves money for the council—we need to be smarter at measuring the impact, which in turn may lead to more "invest to save" opportunities.



Expand services offered by Wigan Housing Solutions to include shared accommodation in view of recent Crisis bid success

Rolling out of the letting agency accreditation scheme.

Extending the pilot with welcome credit union - where landlords are paid housing benefit direct through the tenants welcome credit union account.

Complete the review of the future management of Council Housing in the borough.

Looking at opportunities for leasing former council properties.

Promoting the good trader scheme to landlords through the landlords forum, email bul-



Council staff are able to offer individual solutions for clients

## Increasing choice and independence for those with specialist care needs

The Housing Strategy team are working jointly with staff in the council's People directorate to develop innovative ways of meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable residents in the community which will reduce the cost and risk to the Council. There are now a number of schemes being developed (comprising approx 70 units), mainly working in partnership with private landlords and not for profit companies to build, buy, adapt or refurbish properties to provide suitable homes for people with specialist needs. The move towards Personal Budgets – where clients have their own dedicated budget to spend rather than the Council contracting blocks of care services - offers a range of opportunities to the private sector as individuals will have the

freedom to choose their product if they develop something that is affordable and attractive.

The outcome is that individuals have better choice and control over where and how they live, which usually means they need less formal support and in turn, the Council saves considerable amounts on the costs of funding care packages. Examples include one person living within a group of other people in a supported housing scheme who was receiving 90 hours support per week approached the Housing Brokerage team explaining he wanted to move into his own accommodation. The team helped him find a new home, which allowed him access alternative, informal support networks including work, college and friends.

He has become much more independent and as a result only needs a third of the commissioned support he used to get. We also work with families of other individuals who need very high levels of support, who previously would have been placed out of the borough or in residential homes, we identify suitable properties that are for sale in the borough and then ask accredited landlords to buy the property, undertake any necessary refurbishment and adaptations and to let it to the person we have identified. Individuals assisted through this route can save the Council up to £100,000 each per year in care costs alone. As landlords carry out the adaptations themselves, our budget for Disabled Facilities Grants can then be used to help others.

### VISION - PEOPLE

People are healthy and active and receive the support they need

## Promoting sustainable communities on our estates

Since introducing our New Build Local Lettings Policy, the policy has been applied to the first letting of 154 new properties – 46 apartments, 11 bungalows and 97 family-houses.

The aim of the policy is to create a more balanced community in schemes where a number of residents are moving in together and targets have been set in relation to overcrowded and under-occupying households, working

people and families with a local connection.

Overall outcomes have been good with targets being exceeded in many cases. Plus an additional 22 properties were freed up in the social housing sector by people downsizing to new build accommodation. A significant further number of social housing vacancies were also generated by those overcrowded in their previous accommodation, thus helping to rehouse other applicants on the waiting list. However, the fact that a lot of properties

became available to let in a short space of time, particularly in the Scholes/Whalley area meant that the waiting lists were exhausted and some offers were refused.

From our initial analysis it appears that the aim of creating a more diverse mix of residents on the new estates has been achieved, however, we intend to carry out further in depth analysis of the longer term impact on residents and the community over the next year.



## Older residents are “Full of Life”

Councillor Keith Cunliffe, cabinet champion for healthy communities dropped into the events



A series of ‘Full of Life’ days for older people were held in September, organised by council officers and partners including Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust and Wigan

and Leigh Housing at venues around the borough including the Rowans in Mosley Common, Legh Court in Golborne, plus in Worsley Mesnes and Ince.

The events were timed to mark the International Day for Older Persons, observed by the United Nations on 1st October. With a range of activities including Zumba, aromatherapy, bingo and Wii fit those attending enjoyed a fun and informative day. The events high-

lighted the wealth of support available for older people in Wigan and with over 30 agencies attending over the week, feedback has shown that the events have raised awareness of services amongst older people and provided a great networking opportunity for the agencies attending.

## More help on leaving hospital

A new joint protocol developed by Wigan Council, Wigan and Leigh Housing and the hospital trusts was launched in October that aims to speed up referrals for those at risk of homelessness on leaving hospital. The protocol aims to help an estimated 40 to 50 people each year who are discharged from hospital without a suitable home

to return to.

The protocol encourages hospital staff to ask a few simple questions regarding patients intentions on leaving hospital to find out if they would benefit from advice or support to find an alternative home or to make their current home more suitable for their needs. A single referral point has been introduced to the Housing Options

Advice Centre, who will then assess and find a solution to suit each individual. They have links to all the services in the borough that help with homelessness; including temporary accommodation, visiting support, aids and adaptations and help with finding a more suitable permanent home.

## New supported housing for young people



August 2011, saw the opening of a new supported housing project at Brecon Close, Platt Bridge, since opening it has housed 13 young people. The pilot project will run for two years and has been funded through

Supporting People and Working Neighbourhoods Fund. It is based on a foyer model, helping young people with challenging backgrounds access training and development in order to assist with future employability and gaining the life skills to achieve independent living. The scheme has

put a former homeless hostel owned by the council to use with support and building management provided by Arena Options.

## Our Performance -Quantity

Indicator	2010/11	2011/12		
	Outturn	target	Q1	Q2
Number of net homes provided (former NI154)	451	400	55*	5*
Number of affordable homes delivered (gross) (Former NI155)	162	80	8	3
Number of additional affordable homes made available through LA interventions (local - Hous001)	641 (cumilative)	196	34	60
Percentage of private sector homes empty for more than 6 months (Local)	2.50%	2.40%	2.52%	TBA
Number of empty homes returned to use or demolished with LA advice or action (Local - )	5740	5600	1397	TBA

\* Interim figures

## Quality

Indicator	2010/11	2011/12		
	Outturn	target	Q1	Q2
Percentage of non decent council homes (Former NI158)	1.63%	2%		
Local authority tenant satisfaction with landlord service (Former NI160)	87%	90%		
Number of non decent homes within the private sector made decent (Local)	48	50	11	9
Number of AWARM referrals completed	296	300	107	95

## People

Indicator	2010/11	2011/12		
	Outturn	target	Q1	Q2
Number of households living in temporary accommodation (Former NI156)	15	19	16	20
No. of households per 1000 in the borough whose homelessness is prevented or relieved by through positive action (local Hous006)	8.02	7.00	1.57	2.17
Percentage of vulnerable people achieving independent living (Former NI141)	84.1%	85.0%	86.2%	87.4%
Percentage of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living (Former NI142)	98.9%	89.5%	98.3%	98.4%

**Wigan Council**

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**Confident Place, Confident People.**

## Stop Press— Funding Opportunities

There are a number of forthcoming funding opportunities in the next few months that we will be seeking to pursue.

**Empty Homes Fund—**The Homes and Communities Agency are soon to issue a prospectus for bids for a £100m programme. The deadline for bids is likely to be January 2011.

**Warm Homes Healthy People Fund —** to continue or work to tackle fuel poverty. Deadline for bids is December 2011.

**Growing Places—** Opportunities to bring forward key developments to deliver infrastructure and homes. Investment opportunities will be available through the Greater Manchester Local Investment Partnership.



Other opportunities are likely to become available following the forthcoming launch of the National Housing Strategy.

We are also continuing our work on mortgage initiatives and the AGMA private sector investment model and other joint initiatives with Greater Manchester authorities.

**Empty homes funding opportunities**