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Housing Partnership Newsletter

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Raising the roof on housing standards



Housing conditions in Wigan are significantly better than the national average, a major independent report has revealed.

Every five years the council commissions a housing condition survey of the borough. It looks at the condition of housing and records householders' views about their homes and the areas they live in.

Earlier this year the council appointed independent Leigh-based consultants Michael Howard Associates to conduct the latest survey. They surveyed 2,413 randomly selected homes using government methodology.

The results show that Wigan is consistently performing above national averages in terms of housing conditions.

Decent Homes Standard

This is the current government standard for homes and covers fitness, repair, modern facilities, insulation and heating.

72.7 per cent of private sector homes occupied by vulnerable people meet the Decent Homes Standard. This means that

government targets for 2006 and 2010 have already been met.

80.2 per cent of council homes meet the Decent Homes Standard. The government has set a target for all council homes to meet this standard by 2010. Wigan is on track to meet it by 2008.

The report found that just 17.6 per cent of all homes do not meet the Decent Homes Standard, compared with 38 per cent nationally. It is estimated that £125.78m is needed to improve these homes.

Fitness Standard

This is a part of the Decent Homes Standard and is the current minimum legal standard for all homes.

97.9 per cent of homes are fit, compared to 95.8 per cent nationally.

97.7 per cent of owner occupied homes are fit, compared to 96.8 per cent nationally.

99.4 per cent of council homes are fit, compared with 95.3 per cent nationally.

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All housing association homes are fit, compared to 96.6 per cent nationally.

94.5 per cent of privately rented homes are fit, compared to 89.1 per cent nationally.

Empty Homes

97.4 per cent of homes are occupied, compared with 97 per cent nationally.

Energy Efficiency

This is rated using a Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP). The higher the SAP, the more energy efficient the home is. A SAP of less than 40 is considered poor.

The average SAP rating for homes in the borough is 59 compared to 51 nationally.

Improvement Trends

The level of improvements in housing conditions in the borough over the last 10 years is summarised below:

Housing Survey	1996	2000	2005
Fit (%)	92	95	97.9
Occupied (%)	95	97	97.4
Energy Efficient (%)	42	73.6	93

Wigan Council's Cabinet Member for Community Protection Cllr Keith Cunliffe said the results confirmed the success of the council's housing strategy.

"When it comes to housing we are committed to achieving a great deal," said Cllr Cunliffe.

"From improving private sector housing by declaring renewal areas to bringing empty homes back into use through enforcement.

"What is also clear from this survey and the pattern of improvement it illustrates is the tremendous impact the creation of the Arms Length Management Organisation — Wigan & Leigh Homes — has had on improving council homes and estates.

"Our aim is to improve the quality of life for everyone in Wigan and while we are delighted that the survey suggests we are doing the right things and continuing to improve we are by no means complacent. Clearly there is more work to be done and we will continue to strive to do our very best for all tenants and residents of the borough."

Bonding the Borough

Wigan Council through Wigan Homelessness Forum has launched its very own bond scheme. This scheme is aimed at helping people who are disadvantaged by the current housing situation in the borough.

The increasing numbers of homeless presentations combined with rising house prices mean that many people on lower incomes cannot resolve their own housing situation. They cannot afford to buy a property and there is a massive demand for social housing. Private landlords require a financial bond or deposit from new tenants and for many people this can act as a barrier to them being able to access tenancies in the private rented market.

The scheme will offer bonds to private landlords in the form of a written guarantee rather than actual cash amount and support will be offered to both tenants and landlords to make the tenancy a success. Through a partnership with Unify Credit Union, tenants will be encouraged to save a realistic weekly amount so that in the future they can provide their own bond to landlords. All landlords taking part in the scheme will be expected to be accredited or be working towards the landlord's accreditation.

Wigan Bond Scheme, funded through Community Protection Department, was launched on 19th August 2005 at an extremely well attended event at JJB, Wigan. Bob Saunders chaired the event and guest speakers included Neil Turner MP, Louise Atherton, Bond Scheme Worker (based at CAB) and representatives from North West Landlords Association.

If you would like to know more about Wigan Bond Scheme, please contact Michelle Feeney, Housing Policy Officer on 01942 486789.



Prevention pair start in post

Wigan Council, through Wigan Homelessness Forum, has funded two new posts to help tackle Wigan's homelessness problem.

Lisa Kidston, based at Citizens Advice, has been employed to take on the role of Housing Literacy Worker. The post aims to empower people so they are able to manage their own housing situations effectively, which will help prevent them from becoming homeless. Lisa will carry out workshops across the Borough with groups of people who are most at risk of becoming homeless, for example young people or offenders. The workshops will cover issues such as financial management and how to minimise debt, as well as focusing on how to manage a tenancy and the responsibilities that this involves.

Funding has also been given to Wigan and Leigh Homes to employ a Homelessness Prevention Officer. Carole Willcock will be working with people who present as homeless to help them resolve their housing problems before they reach crisis point. The post aims to encourage people to avoid becoming homeless by making planned moves rather than allowing situations to arise that cannot be resolved, for example by getting in to rent arrears or relationships breaking down with families.

If you would like more information about either of these projects, please contact Michelle Feeney on 01942 486789.

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

It's a good call!

Wigan and Leigh Housing's 'state of the art' contact centre has achieved 'best practice' standard – one of just five local authority call centres nationally to qualify for the Call Centre Association's (CCA) prestigious award.



Tom Frost, joint chair of the Wigan and Leigh Housing Board, presents Jason Brown and Laura Clee with their NVQ Level 2 certificates.

The CCA standard is awarded only to those contact centres that conform to a rigorous set of criteria and achieve consistently high levels of customer satisfaction. CCA's Standard Framework is broken down into a number of sections, which include culture, service performance, organisational efficiency, people and communication. Each area is assessed to determine the overall effectiveness and efficiency for delivering good customer service.

Since its launch last year, the contact centre has performed impressively with 80% of calls answered within 60 seconds and 95% within 90 seconds. In addition, every mobile text enquiry and e-mail has been answered within one working day and fewer than one in twenty callers have hung up before receiving an answer.

The Leigh-based centre serves 23,750 council tenants, and other customers using the housing service. Staff now deal with over 15,000 calls every month and a recent poll of 1,800 customers resulted in a satisfaction rating of nearly 99%.

Contact centre staff are given NVQ training in call handling and many have already progressed to NVQ Level 2.

Plan It Wigan

A new Wigan Borough Community Plan has just been launched by the Wigan Borough Partnership. The Plan sets out the future vision for the Borough and includes a series of goals and plans on how we all need to work in partnership to make the goals a reality.

The work of the Housing Partnership largely focuses on Goal 6 of the Community Plan – “Provide access to decent homes in clean safe neighbourhoods”.

Over the last few years the Housing Partnership has monitored the progress that they have made, using a number of ‘performance measures’:-

Key Measures	2004/05 position
Homes meeting the decent homes standard	82%
Affordability Index (percentage better than the regional average)	11%
Empty homes in the Borough	3.65%
Homelessness applications dealt with in 33 days	82%
Homes containing vulnerable people which are decent	73%
Council homes meeting the decent standard	78%
Satisfaction with improvement works to Council housing	93%
Satisfaction with private sector renewal works	85%
Energy efficiency of public sector homes	61(SAP)
Number of private homes with poor insulation levels (under 40)	5362

Significant progress has been made in most areas. Most impressive is our progress on providing decent housing, with results of the stock condition survey suggesting that we will reach 2010 government targets by 2008.

For more information about the Community Plan go to www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/commplan/

For more information about the Housing Partnership call Peter Layland on 01942 404135 or email p.layland@wiganmbc.gov.uk

Affordable action



A new scheme to provide affordable housing in the Borough is to be published for consultation by Wigan Council. The need for affordable housing was first highlighted by the Housing Needs Survey for the Borough carried out in 2003. It found that despite the area’s

traditional low house prices, escalating property prices had created an affordability problem in parts of the Borough.

The Council’s response to this finding was to make provision in the *Replacement Unitary Development Plan* for the Planning Committee to require that larger private housing schemes include a percentage of affordable housing.

The details of how this policy will operate have now been published in a *Supplementary Planning Document* entitled “*Affordable Housing Provision in New Residential Developments*”. The document is in draft form only to enable as wide a range of organisations and people as possible (including the Wigan Borough Housing Partnership) to give their comments on how it can be improved. It is available on the Council’s web site, at the main Council offices and libraries and will be sent to a wide range of organisations concerned with housing matters. The consultation period runs from 10 October to 21 November 2005.

The scheme follows Government guidance in expecting larger new housing estates to include a percentage of affordable housing but also puts forward some innovative approaches to such provision. These include providing affordable housing on other sites, refurbishment of defective housing to create affordable housing or re-using vacant houses or other buildings for affordable housing.

Copies of the document will be available from the 10 October 2005 on the Council’s web site at www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/planning/pages/spd.htm or at main Council Offices and libraries.

POPPs in the pipeline

Wigan Council's Social Services Department will soon find out if they have been successful in a bid to the Department of Health (DoH) for just under £1.8 million.



The Partnerships for Older People Project (POPPs) bid focuses on providing new preventative services for older people. It was put together by a multi-agency working group, which included: Social Services (lead); Age Concern; Greater Manchester Police; Community Protection Department; Wigan and Leigh Homes; Pensioners Link; Victim Support and Witness Service; Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust; Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust; Crossroads Care Scheme; and Ashton, Leigh and Wigan PCT.

The bid is based on the idea that by providing low level and targeted support to older people when it is needed, higher level and more expensive support services can be delayed or prevented.

A wide range of services were included in the bid. Some of the housing focused projects include:

- 'Gardening and Handyperson Home Maintenance Scheme', which is aimed at providing home maintenance and gardening services to older people.
- 'Sheltered housing improvements' which takes a dual approach of improving access to current users of sheltered housing and renovating an unused wardens flat into a 'multiple use' respite facility as an alternative to residential care.
- 'Crime prevention awareness and support', which aims to provide security equipment and hardware and increase awareness of 'bogus callers'.

The DoH aims to announce the successful bidders in early October. For more information please call Eleanor Richardson on 01942 486788 or email e.richardson@wiganmbc.gov.uk

Action Against Domestic Violence

The Domestic Violence Executive Group is delighted to have employed a new Domestic Violence Co-ordinator to pick up from where Helen Morgan left off.

Helen Perry will be based within Wigan and Leigh Housing (WALH). Her post was introduced following a successful bid to the Children's Fund and Douglas Valley, and is funded until March 2007.

National research shows that as many of 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime, and all children living in a violent household will suffer emotionally from the experience.

Between April 2004 – March 2005 police in Wigan recorded 6,074 incidents of domestic violence, 3,075 of which were repeat incidents.

Domestic violence is defined as... "abusive and threatening behaviour that is perpetrated across all ages, social classes and ethnic groupings. It may be physical, sexual, financial or emotional in nature and be used between persons who have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender".

Helen hopes that by implementing an effective recording and referral system, developing a training and communication strategy, and identifying gaps in service, the development of interagency working will improve the situation for victims living in Wigan.

To begin this process there is already a directory available for agencies working with Victims and Survivors of Domestic Violence and their Children in Wigan.

If you would like a copy of this or would like more information about tackling domestic violence in Wigan please contact Helen Perry on 01942 486604 or email h.perry@walh.co.uk

For more information about Domestic Violence services in Wigan go to www.wiganhomelessnessforum.org.uk/AdviceServices/DV