



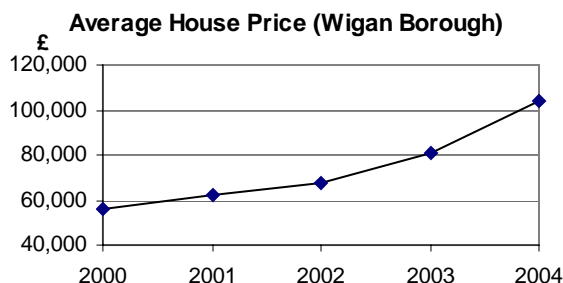
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Issue 3 Housing Partnership Newsletter November 2004

Average House Price in Wigan now over £100,000

Over the last two years, Wigan's housing market has boomed. Recent research has shown that average house prices have risen by 65% with even greater increase within the terraced housing market.



Source: Land Registry

Wigan's house prices are still significantly lower than the average in England or the North West. However, its rate of increase is now above most other areas. For example, two years ago only Oldham in Greater Manchester had lower prices but now Rochdale, Salford and Bolton also have lower prices.

Looking at prices within Wigan, there are also some quite dramatic variations, for example, a terraced property in Standish and Golborne currently average £92,000 yet in Hindley/ Abram a similar property would sell for £56,000.

However, this boom in the local market is not all good news. The Council's monitoring shows that two years ago, 70% of first time buyers could afford to buy a property but in today's climate that figure has fallen to approximately 45%. This situation is evident in the massive increase in demand for Council housing and the higher rates of homelessness over the same period.

This key issue of the accessibility of housing will be discussed at the Housing Partnership Event in November 2004.

National Housing Changes

A number of key government announcements and changes in legislation are likely to have a profound effect on our local housing strategies.

Firstly, government are looking to housing to play a key role in its drive to create sustainable communities. It is looking to direct investment to either reinforce poorly performing housing markets or to increase the affordable housing supply where shortages occur.

Secondly, the government are also considering key changes that would allow a much closer integration between housing investment decisions and the planning system, so that local needs can be met. This would allow greater Council control over the type and location of new housing developments.

Finally the new Housing Bill is also introducing major changes including:

- Replacement of the current fitness standard in private housing. A new hazard rating system will allow Councils to concentrate attention on the worst properties.
- Bringing in a licencing system for the larger Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Possibility of licencing for private landlords in certain areas.

Other provisions in the bill include modernisation of the Right to Buy scheme, introduction of home information packs to make home buying and selling more transparent and new powers to tackle anti-social behaviour.

For further information, please contact the Housing Strategy Unit on: 01942 827702

Wigan Borough Partnership Issues

The Housing Partnership is one of the thematic partnerships that contribute to the wider Wigan Borough Partnership. (WBP) Key news items for the wider partnership include:

The WBP has been assessed by the Audit Commission for its organisation and effectiveness and it has been judged (along with the Housing Partnership) as being a "good performing local strategic partnership".

- Currently the WBP is looking to develop its performance management framework, by which it looks at and monitors each individual partnerships contribution to achieving its goals. As a result, Action Plans within the Community Plan goals are being developed. The overall responsibility for the Housing Partnership's goal of "**A decent home in a safe clean neighbourhood**" lies with the Community Safety Partnership. A series of housing targets have been agreed in draft to ensure our contribution is measured and accountable. These detailed proposals will be discussed within the Partnership over the coming months.
- Finally, the WBP is currently developing a new Community Plan. This is the key document that guides overall partnership development and the work of each individual partnership, Consultation on this process is occurring via workshops and Partnership meetings and will be drawn together at the overall Partnership Convention in February 2005.
- Contact for the work of the Borough Partnership is Simon Dale.
Telephone: 01942 776171

Wigan Shines at Beacon Open Day

The Wigan and Bolton joint Beacon Council Open Day was held on the 19 October 2004 and proved to be a big hit with all who took part.

Over 80 delegates from around the UK came to the Reebok Stadium to learn about Wigan and Bolton's approach to private sector housing renewal. A variety of activities and approaches to learning were offered including presentations, workshops, bus tours, leaflets and displays.

Feedback from delegates was extremely positive and credit should be given to all the staff and representatives from both Wigan and Bolton who worked hard to make the day a success.

Wigan were presented with their Beacon award for their innovative and dynamic approach to Private Sector Housing Renewal.



The photograph above provides an example of the type of work carried out by Wigan Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal team. Their work was recognised and awarded Beacon status earlier this year.

For more information about Wigan's Beacon Award go to: www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/council/beacon/ or contact Eleanor Richardson on 01942 486788.

Older Persons Forum

As part of the ongoing work achieved by the Older Persons Forum a new sub-group has been formed to focus on the development of the Older Persons Housing Strategy.

Made up of a variety of partners from the public and voluntary sectors the group has already made progress by identifying the main issues related to older people's housing. This has been achieved by developing a timetable for future actions and beginning a mapping exercise of older persons housing related services, as well as considering consultation already carried out and examples of best practice.

The group will be focusing on three themes for the strategy:

- Providing independence to older people.
- Providing safe and secure homes and neighbourhoods.
- Providing choice including information and access to services.

Future work will include identifying an ideal view of services based on local needs, national trends and emerging best practice. Any gaps in service will then be prioritised and short and long term strategies will be developed.

- For more information please contact Eleanor Richardson on 01942 486788, or email E.Richardson@wiganmbc.gov.uk

Supporting People Update

Wigan's Supporting People Team are currently gathering research and information to include in their Supporting People Strategy, to be submitted to Government by March 2005. November will see a consultation event take place with service providers and service users. This month also anticipates the release of the Government's allocation and formula for Supporting People Grant.

- For more information please contact the Supporting People Team on 01942 770753.

Wigan Homelessness Forum Website



The Wigan Homelessness Forum has now launched a website which aims to connect people who become, or are at risk of becoming homeless with organisations that can help. The website gives information about organisations in the borough that can help with accommodation, advice and support to help manage a tenancy. The site also provides useful links to on-line advice guides.

Although the site is open to both the public and professionals, the main purpose of the site is to ensure that agencies that give advice have up-to-date information on services and accommodation available in the borough through the on-line directory. As most people who become homeless don't have easy access to the internet, a directory of services booklet will also be published shortly.

The Housing Strategy Team are carrying out training with various agencies within the borough to maximise the use of the website and ensure that all agencies dealing with homelessness can access the on-line directory. A training pack has been designed to complement this work. Business cards have also been printed to promote the site to the public.

The address of the website is:
www.wiganhomelessnessforum.org.uk

For further information please contact Michelle Feeny on 01942 486789 or email m.feeny@wiganmbc.gov.uk

Wigan and Leigh Housing Inspection

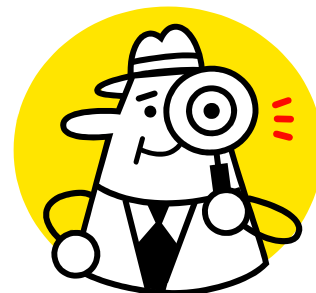
Wigan & Leigh Housing (WALH) are preparing for a further inspection of their services which will be undertaken in February 2005.

The last inspection rated WALH as a "two star organisation with promising prospects for improvement". The bar has continuously been raised by the Inspectorate since the last inspection. Services which were previously ranked as "good" may only be considered "fair" if they have not improved. Areas which were considered to be weaker at the last inspection will be scrutinised closely to see what progress has been made.

The re-inspection will be carried out under a new framework, much of which has only recently been published. It will look at four cross-cutting themes of:

- Access
- Equality & Diversity
- Performance Management & Governance
- Value for Money & Efficiency

Preparing for a successful inspection will be an onerous and challenging process. Whilst WALH consider themselves to be a better organisation delivering better services than at the time of the last inspection, they are not complacent.



Better Homes on Call



Wigan and Leigh Housing (WALH) have introduced a new Better Homes on Call service in recent months. Tenants are able to telephone, e-mail or use a mobile phone to text repairs to the WALH Repairs Contact Centre.

Over 12,000 calls have been answered in the first two months and due to positive feedback about the service, the facility is to be extended to all WALH tenants in the borough.

The service aims to maximise the number of calls handled and has improved links with repairs contractors to help speed up the repair service.

Housing Partnership

The next Partnership Convention is to be held at 9 am on **Tuesday 30th November 2004** at the JJB Stadium in Wigan.



If you have not received an invitation and agenda, please contact the Housing Strategy Section on 01942 486789 or e-mail: hs@wiganmbc.gov.uk

Team Changes

The Housing Strategy Unit has experienced a few changes over recent months with several members of the team receiving promotions whilst also welcoming new members to the team and the Council.



The team is now as follows:

Peter Layland – 01942 404135
Assistant Director (Urban Renewal)

Anees Mank – 01942 827446
Private Sector Housing Manager

Steve Sargent – 01942 827702
Housing Strategy Manager

Michell Woodburn – 01942 827074
Housing Policy Officer

Michelle Feeney – 01942 486789
Housing Policy Officer

Eleanor Richardson – 01942 486788
Housing Policy Officer

The team has also relocated, moving from their previous base at Wigan Town Hall to Unity House, Westwood Park Drive. They moved to the premises in August along with other members of the Community Protection Department and Wigan and Leigh Housing who are now using Unity House as their Headquarters.

Any News?

Do you have any news or information that is relevant to the Housing Partnership and this newsletter? If so, we are

more than happy to include your article in future editions. Please contact Michelle Feeney on 01942 486789 for details.

