



Watford Borough Council

# Watford Housing Strategy 2015-2020

February 2015



# Foreword to the Housing Strategy by Watford's Elected Mayor



## Welcome to Watford's new Housing Strategy and Action Plan.

Housing is one of our biggest challenges in Watford. We have exceeded our housing delivery targets, yet Watford is a town of high house prices and high rents with a comparatively low supply of land to build on. Therefore we must make the most of all available resources and opportunities to deliver the best housing offer we can for our town.

Our Housing Strategy and Action Plan for 2015 to 2020 sets out our plans. These plans involve improving the supply of new homes, improving the condition of the homes which we already have, introducing special initiatives to meet needs in particular areas, and ensuring that an excellent housing offer contributes to good health, a thriving economy and well-being among our residents.

Watford is a lively and attractive town with excellent shopping, leisure and cultural facilities. It is also a popular place to work and do business. As a result, lots of people wish to live here. Many people who already live here are also seeking a home of their own in the town. Consequently, there is high demand for housing in the borough. Housing needs and aspirations range from those who have moved to Watford to take up employment opportunities and wish to live near their place of work., those who want to move to a home which is more suitable for their families' needs, to those who have become homeless and require an offer of accommodation urgently.

We are facing both challenges and opportunities. The Localism Act 2011 has produced big changes to the way social housing is allocated, the types of tenancies which are offered and the ways that homeless households are assisted. The Energy Act 2011 sets out a new framework to achieve energy efficiency measures for both homes and businesses. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 is introducing radical changes to the system of welfare benefits. The system of funding the development of new affordable homes has changed significantly since 2010. However, there is large potential to attract housing-related funding and investment to our town. This strategy aims to maximize these opportunities for the benefit of Watford's residents.

Our Housing Strategy aims to address a wide spectrum of housing needs and aspirations. We will be undertaking an ambitious agenda of activity to make Watford's housing offer excellent. This will include tasks such as working closely with registered providers to increase the supply of affordable housing, introducing initiatives to promote home energy efficiency, implementing street improvement projects to improve neighbourhoods, and developing a communications strategy to provide better information on housing options. More broadly, we will undertake housing activities to improve health, economic development and well-being in Watford.

We have worked extensively to involve as many people as possible in developing our new Housing Strategy and Action Plan. We would like to thank everyone whose views and recommendations have helped to shape our plans. We very much value our relations with partner organizations, and we look forward to working with them to turn this Housing Strategy into action.

*Dorothy S*

# Watford Housing Strategy 2015-2020 – Summary

## 1. The role of a Housing Strategy in Watford

**“The purpose of a housing strategy is to guide local action – to assess the current and future balance of housing supply and demand, the working of the market, the impact of local conditions on people’s lives, and on the achievement of social goals – and to plan effective intervention.”**

*(Goss and Blackaby, 1998)*

Watford is a very dynamic borough. It has seen big demographic, economic and tenure-related changes since the beginning of the millennium. The town offers high achieving schools, a wide range of job opportunities, attractive leisure activities and diverse cultural facilities. Consequently it is an increasingly popular place to live and there is high demand for all types of housing in the borough. Watford is also a town of big ambitions and potential to grow further in terms of population and employment.

With the borough’s very small size, high population density and urbanised built environment, the task of maintaining an excellent housing offer to support sustainable growth and to maintain high quality of life in the town is a formidable challenge. The market alone cannot meet housing needs; therefore, a planned and interventionist approach is required. It is the role of a housing strategy to identify the following:

- Housing related needs and aspirations
- The housing-related interventions that should have high priority in improving the Housing Offer to meet needs and aspirations.
- The resources available to implement those housing-related interventions.
- Partnerships which will achieve successful outcomes.

### **Reasons why Watford needs a strategic approach to housing through the Local Plan and housing-related strategies and policies**

- i) To ensure a co-ordinated approach to housing activity in Watford and a coherent suite of policies and strategies to deliver the council’s ambitions.
- ii) To balance the housing agenda with other agendas such as sustainable economic growth.
- iii) To promote housing’s role in delivering the corporate agenda and wider objectives including health and wellbeing.
- iv) To ensure housing retains a high corporate profile and contributes to the council’s status of being well positioned to influence and deliver.
- v) To maximise opportunities and resources to meet housing needs and aspirations, using Council assets and external or partnership funding opportunities.

- vi) To maximise out-of-borough and cross-boundary development opportunities in partnership with neighbouring authorities.
- vii) To prevent and tackle issues which lead to poor housing conditions, such as overcrowding and privately owned housing in poor condition.
- viii) To support economic growth in Watford, with employers able to recruit staff and retain skilled employees.

The Watford Borough Council Housing Strategy will support the delivery of the Local Plan and will form the overarching direction for the following housing-related strategies, policies and plans:-

- The Watford Borough Council Nominations Policy
- The Watford Borough Council Tenancy Strategy
- The Watford Borough Council Homelessness Review, Strategy and Action Plan
- The Watford Borough Council Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.

The Housing Strategy will complement the following corporate plans, policies and projects which are being carried out by other council teams:

- Watford's Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy 2006-2031
- Watford's Local Plan Part 2 – Sites Allocations and Development Management
- The Duty to Co-operate
- The review of the Council's property and assets.
- The Watford Borough Corporate Plan 2014-2018
- The introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy
- The Residential Design Guide
- The Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- The Watford Council Economic Development Strategy.



## 2. Diagnosis of need and Guiding Policy

### The Diagnosis of need

Watford's housing need can be summarised as consisting of the following:-

- i) Demand for housing greatly exceeds supply.
- ii) Housing for market sale or market rent is mostly unaffordable to people on low to medium incomes.
- iii) The delivery of affordable housing is becoming more challenging.
- iv) Watford is a small borough and there are competing demands for development on its land.
- v) Watford's existing housing stock requires a range of improvements to ensure it continues to offer suitable, safe, warm and healthy homes.

### Selected policy options for the Housing Strategy:-

*The Housing Strategy will adopt a whole housing market approach, and will not focus just on housing for those in highest housing need.*

*The Housing Strategy will be open to the merits of introducing a range of new tenures, and will not focus on just the limited number of traditional tenures.*

*The Housing Strategy will focus on both optimising the supply of new housing and improving the condition of existing housing, not just on the issue of a new supply of housing.*

*The Housing Strategy will aim to empower property owners and tenants to take action to improve their housing circumstances, helping them to make informed choices and raising aspirations.*

### Guiding principles for the Strategy

1. Evidence-based
2. Agile and adding value, with an annual review of performance indicators and priorities.
3. Bold prioritisation
4. Recognition that we are working in a changing environment.
5. Promotion of support and self-reliance
6. An emphasis on communication and engagement with the community.
7. A clear understanding of where the council can intervene and where it can influence.
8. To empower residents and property owners to improve their housing circumstances.

### Guiding principles for Action Plan

1. Bold prioritisation
2. Realistic and resourced
3. Identification of who is best placed to deliver: assets, skills, time, resources
4. Open to new partnerships
5. Strong scoping and management of projects
6. Celebrating achievements.

### 3. The vision for the Housing Strategy

Following extensive consultation, the following vision for Watford's Housing Strategy has been devised:

**A Housing Strategy that will improve the well-being of local people by making Watford a better place to live, with sustainable and healthy homes, and a balanced, vibrant community.**

### 4. The Structure of the Housing Strategy

The Watford Housing Strategy shall consider Watford's housing needs and appropriate interventions to meet these challenges on four levels:-



**Aims** set the overall direction in which the housing strategy will develop.

**Themes** identify particular areas of activity in which housing-related interventions will take place. The housing strategy is structured around six themes.

**Priorities** will identify the activities within the themes which are likely to produce the most beneficial impact if they receive resources and are the focus for activity. The priorities will guide the development of the action plan.

**Tasks** are the translation of the priorities into action which will implement housing-related interventions. The tasks will be specific, measurable, resourced and timetabled.

#### **Aims:-**

**Aim 1:** To provide an overarching direction for housing activity in Watford that supports the long-term sustainable growth of Watford and its economy.

**Aim 2:** To support delivery of the Watford Borough Council vision: a successful town in which people are proud to live and to identify interventions in the whole housing market.

**Aim 3:** To maximise achievements by managing competing demands, including:-

- Single person households vs Family households
- Offices/commercial vs Residential
- Investors vs Occupiers
- The influences of the areas surrounding Watford.
- Watford as a whole vs Ward/Area based actions.

**Aim 4:** To ensure that housing-related activity and interventions contribute to the well-being of residents and the prosperity of Watford.

**Aim 5:** To support long-term sustainable economic growth and environments in Watford.

**Aim 6:** To predict and respond to change and future trends

**Aim 7:** To seek out and attract housing-related investment by having a clear strategy and by creating conditions which are conducive to strategic and operational investment.

## Themes:-

**Theme 1:** Improving the supply of housing

**Theme 2:** Improving the condition and management of housing

**Theme 3:** Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.

**Theme 4:** Key locations

**Theme 5:** Well-being, Economy and Health

**Theme 6:** Communication

## Priorities within the themes:-

### Theme 1: Improving the supply of housing

#### Priorities:-

- **Priority 1:-** To influence the type of new housing that is provided by inputting into the Planning process and working with private sector providers and registered providers
- **Priority 2:-** Work with registered providers to achieve a balance between traditional social rented properties and new business which enables them to develop other types of homes, such as affordable rent, market rent, homes for sale.
- **Priority 3:-** To contribute to the implementation of the council's forthcoming Asset Management strategy.

#### Tasks:-

- **Task 1** – Developing, testing and publicising annual dataset with conclusions to inform the housing mix.
- **Task 2** – Participate in the production of a Strategic Housing Market Assessment in partnership with neighbouring boroughs.
- **Task 3** – To establish and maintain frameworks for engagement with registered provider partners, private developers and property owners. This will include information sharing, accessing funding and development opportunities, and local marketing initiatives.
- **Task 4** – Annual review of the Tenancy Strategy.
- **Task 5** – Further tasks to be defined pending Property Review

## Theme 2: Improving the condition and management of housing

### Priorities:-

- **Priority 1:-** To revise the Private Sector Renewal Policy (includes grant and loans assistance) to make homes decent and adapt them for disabled access.
- **Priority 2:-** Increase the awareness of letting agents, private landlords and tenants regarding acceptable standards, responsibilities and remedies in order to empower them to make informed choices.
- **Priority 3:-** To improve the condition of the housing stock to enable the provision of safe, sustainable, healthy and well-maintained homes.
- **Priority 4:-** Renew cross service procedures to improve the customer experience and effectiveness of casework on overcrowding and illegal/retaliatory eviction and harassment.
- **Priority 5:-** Renew evidence base through an assessment of Watford's housing stock which samples a range of homes and indicates the issues with stock which we need to address e.g. energy efficiency.

### Tasks:-

- **Task 1** – Revise the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.
- **Task 2** – Initiatives promoted in revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.
- **Task 3** – Production of a suite of advice and information material which covers the full range of services available.
- **Task 4** – Publication of the above through website, leaflet, roadshows, social media, advertising through lettings agents.
- **Task 5** – Introduce a framework to enforce the Redress scheme and include compliance across council private sector access schemes.
- **Task 6** – Review Care and Repair Provision
- **Task 7** – Review the current scope and effectiveness of casework on overcrowding.
- **Task 8** – Implement action plan to develop our strategic and operational response to overcrowding.
- **Task 9** – Investigate the need for a service to respond to illegal/retaliatory eviction and harassment.
- **Task 10** – Implement action plan to develop our strategic and operational response to illegal/retaliatory eviction and harassment in order to minimise housing need.
- **Task 11** – Commission a private sector stock condition survey/model.
- **Task 12** – Develop policy responses from the stock condition survey to inform appropriate policies, strategies and procedures.
- **Task 13** – Undertake Home Energy Efficiency publicity campaigns to raise awareness of the options which are available, and deliver improvements as recommended in local Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) reports.

### Theme 3: Support to specific client groups where intervention is needed

#### Priorities:-

- **Priority 1:-** To carry out an annual review of the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.
- **Priority 2:-** To implement and monitor a revised Housing Nomination Policy and a Private Sector Discharge Policy including management of customer expectations.
- **Priority 3:-** To engage with private landlords with the aim of increasing the availability of privately rented homes for households in housing need.
- **Priority 4:-** To devise plans to increase the supply of wheelchair accessible temporary accommodation for homeless households.
- **Priority 5:-** Older people – support activity to improve registered provider sheltered housing to become flexicare accommodation which will meet the current and future needs of Watford residents.

#### Tasks:-

- **Task 1** – Review and publish an annual update of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.
- **Task 2** – Implementation of the revised Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.
- **Task 3** – Implementation of the Housing Nominations Policy.
- **Task 4** – Development and implementation of the Private Sector Housing Discharge Policy.
- **Task 5** – Increase the supply of wheelchair accessible temporary housing.
- **Task 6** – Older people: agree decant protocol and associated allocation policies and criteria

### Theme 4: Key locations

#### Priorities:-

- **Priority 1:-** To support the delivery of affordable housing within the Special Policy Areas.
- **Priority 2:-** To implement targeted initiatives such as Street Improvement Projects which tackle a range of issues in specific areas, such as property conditions, the environment and community safety concerns, through a multi-agency approach.

#### Tasks:-

- **Task 1** – Work with Local Asset Based Vehicle (LABV) to procure a registered provider for the Health Campus.
- **Task 2** – Implement a pilot Street Improvement Project for a clearly defined neighbourhood in the borough.

## Theme 5: Well-being, economy and health

### Priorities:-

- **Priority 1:-** Undertake housing related activity in line with health and well-being priorities for the borough, such as achieving “safe and healthy homes”. This will be consistent with the new Code for Sustainable Homes whose nine measures of sustainability include Health and Well-being.
- **Priority 2:-** Undertake housing related activity to support economic growth in Watford in consultation with Watford’s business community.

### Tasks:-

- **Task 1** – Undertake assessment of Watford’s housing stock to better understand the housing conditions in Watford, and to ensure that health related data identified in the house condition survey.
- **Task 2** – Undertake housing related activity in line with health priorities for the borough, such as achieving “safe and health homes”, as informed by the above survey result.
- **Task 3** – Support emerging initiatives in the council’s forthcoming economic development strategy by researching housing-related situations and potential interventions.

## Theme 6: A Communications Strategy for housing

### Priorities:-

- **Priority 1:-** To develop a co-ordinated communications strategy for housing-related issues in Watford to achieve the following:-
  - o Convey a range of messages, such as expectations on the availability of affordable housing for rent, on a range of housing options, on sources of housing-related assistance, on the availability of support services, and to improve perceptions of a range of housing options.
  - o To communicate information to meet the requirements, expectations and aspirations of a range of ages and demographic groups, and to communicate with more “difficult to reach” groups such as young people, vulnerable people.
  - o To communicate how space can best be used in current accommodation.
  - o To be receptive to existing and new technological options for communications
- **Priority 2:-** To devise an approach to community engagement on housing growth issues, in partnership with registered providers

### Tasks:-

- **Task 1** – to develop the Communications Strategy for housing.
- **Task 2** – to implement the Communications Strategy for housing.
- **Task 3** – to devise an approach to community engagement on housing growth issues, in partnership with registered providers.

## 5. Housing Strategy Position Statements

### Housing Growth

Watford has continued to experience high housing delivery rates and has a five year land supply as required by the National Planning Policy Framework.

Watford Borough Council's core strategy puts forward our ambitions for the borough which involve significant economic and housing growth. The site allocation process will recognise the importance of safeguarding commercial sites in order to ensure employment opportunities, while planning for housing growth to support this agenda and protecting our open spaces. The council will encourage innovation such as mixed use schemes in order to balance competing demands on well positioned sites. While much of the growth activity is focused around our major sites, the council will continue to encourage good quality, sustainable development on smaller sites where opportunities arise. Our Residential Design Guide sets out our expectations regarding high quality design.

The council continues its commitment to ensuring affordable housing is provided as part of residential developments and working with registered provider partners to maximise their opportunities for developing homes in our borough. This will include taking a more active role in ensuring partners are aware and have access to government and other funding or site opportunities at the earliest stage possible.

The council acknowledges the role which housing growth can play in promoting sustainable economic growth in Watford. The two most outstanding issues which link housing growth and economic growth are:-

- i) Seeking a co-ordinated approach to meet the needs of both sustainable economic and housing growth in Watford, reflected in the designation of sites for particular types of development.
- ii) Facilitating the development of housing options for Watford employees in receipt of a particular range of incomes e.g. employees of the various parts of the service sector. The aim of this approach is increase the supply of skilled employees in Watford and reduce difficulties in recruitment for certain employment sectors.

When examining the possibilities of residential development in the town centre, the council will encourage housing developers to optimise the quality of design to encourage that the housing options are sustainable for this particular environment. Developers will be encouraged to consult the council's design guide and noise policy in order to ensure suitable design and residential development in suitable locations.

#### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing
- Key locations (wards and neighbourhoods)
- Well-being, Economy and Health
- Communication

## Balancing residential and commercial growth

There is considerable pressure for sites to be released for residential development, which risks undermining the council's ambition for economic growth in the longer term. The council is seeking a co-ordinated approach which will meet the needs of both economic and housing growth in Watford. This will be achieved by safeguarding certain sites for commercial use while acknowledging that some sites previously designated for employment use are no longer viable for this purpose and could more appropriately be redesignated as residential sites.



Specific sites are to be identified and designated for different uses such as residential, commercial and open space.

The council acknowledges the link between housing provision and the ability of employers to recruit and retain their staff, as well as the impact on business relocation decisions. The Housing Strategy has identified the theme of communication as key priority. Part of our strategic approach will be to develop a whole market approach to housing options advice, including proactive work with employers to signpost employees to appropriate accommodation opportunities.

### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing
- Key locations (wards and neighbourhoods)
- Well-being, Economy and Health
- Communication

## Community engagement

The council recognises that economic and housing growth can be controversial within local neighbourhoods. There are opportunities to improve the way in which we communicate the benefits of growth and consult our residents about their concerns. We recognise that the expertise in this field may lie within partner organisations such as registered providers and will seek to work in partnership with them in order to refine our approach to engaging with members of the community.

### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing
- Key locations (wards and neighbourhoods)
- Well-being, Economy and Health
- Communication

## Housing mix

The council will seek the provision of a mix of housing types, sizes and tenures to meet the requirements of all sections of the community. The existing stock profile across Watford varies quite considerably from ward to ward. As Watford is a small borough, the council takes a whole borough approach to achieving its required mix rather than attempting to balance the stock on a ward by ward basis. The areas most suited to higher density development are identified within our Local Plan. In order to retain a balanced profile, lower density family houses with gardens will be sought in more suburban areas.



The council wishes to encourage a good quality, well managed private rented sector and will encourage proposals for new development within this tenure, although this will remain distinct from the affordable housing requirements within our planning policy.

In terms of advising on the council's preferred housing mix within schemes, a services of datasets will be analysed on an annual basis and agreed corporately to inform the council's approach to proposed schemes. The data sets will be agreed annually. At the time of publication they are anticipated to include:-

### Whole housing market information template

- i) Net housing completions
- ii) Projects completions
- iii) Gross affordable housing completions mix provided
- iv) Number of affordable homes provided 2012/2013 and percentage of gross housing completions on qualifying sites.
- v) Gross housing completions by size
- vi) Gross housing completions by type
- vii) Average house prices in Watford
- viii) Market snapshot of homes for sale priced at £300,000 or less
- ix) Market snapshot of homes for private rented whose rent levels is at or below the national maximum Local Housing Allowance level.

### **Affordable housing supply template**

- i) Affordable housing stock profile (bedrooms and bedspaces, flats vs houses)
- ii) Affordable delivery during the previous financial year.
- iii) Affordable lettings during the previous financial year.
- iv) Affordable pipeline
- v) Household types and projections
- vi) Temporary accommodation profile (bedroom requirement and bedspaces)
- vii) Housing register home seekers A-D (bedroom requirement and bedspaces).
- viii) Housing register transfers A-D (bedroom requirements and bedspaces)
- ix) Housing register E or equivalent (bedroom requirement and bedspaces)
- x) Affordability including Local Housing Allowance rates
- xi) Comments e.g. nomination policy changes.

These datasets will be completed and reviewed annually to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose and responsive to changing needs.

The council acknowledges the funding requirements placed on registered providers in order to bring forward new affordable housing. Our Tenancy Strategy sets our expectations regarding conversions from social to affordable rent and the affordability considerations we anticipate registered providers will apply.

Where registered providers have the opportunity to purchase a whole site and can therefore enhance the affordable housing offer beyond the requirements of the section 106 agreement, the council will be open to negotiation on a case by case basis to set the appropriate housing mix of tenure and property type.

The council is monitoring the demand for a new type of housing for employees of Watford. This consists of short-term managed accommodation which is sometimes self-contained and sometimes has shared facilities. This accommodation can be created from buildings which have been used for other purposes e.g. hotel accommodation. If demand grows for this type of accommodation and tenure a new position statement will be devised.

#### **Relevant Themes**

- Improving the supply of housing
- Key locations (wards and neighbourhoods)
- Communication

### **Shared accommodation**

There is considerable demand for housing of all types in Watford. This includes shared accommodation which can offer a more affordable and flexible option for many residents, from professionals working locally or commuting, to those on lower incomes or who are reliant on housing benefit. Watford has some high quality shared housing. The council recognises the interest in property conversions to meet this need and will continue to monitor the impact on residents and businesses.

While it is anticipated that the need for well managed shared accommodation will increase, there is a corresponding pressure on family sized accommodation in Watford. Local Plan II Policy HS5 aims

to safeguard family housing by ensuring that any subsequent conversion of a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) to flats cannot automatically proceed on the grounds of already being an HMO, and will be subject to strict criteria. This is to retain the potential for HMOs to be converted back to family housing which is less easily achieved where conversion to flats has occurred.

The council has considered whether it would be appropriate to apply for an Article 4 directive for the borough. This would require planning permission to be applied for where there was a proposal to convert a property into a House in Multiple Occupation for between 3 to 6 occupants. This is not being pursued at the current time due to the low proportion of HMOs within the borough and the findings that these properties were not causing detriment which would justify additional measures being put in place.



Similarly, the Council has considered whether additional licensing should be introduced to include premises outside the statutory HMO licensing requirement. However, there is no evidence to indicate that this measure is required locally, and there is information to demonstrate that other activities would prove more effective.

The council continues to provide a range of advice and enforcement activity regarding HMOs and the launch of the Street Improvement Project will address issues within priority localities which residents associate with higher density living.

#### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing
- Key locations (wards and neighbourhoods)
- Communication

### **Self build**

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the government's intention to promote self build as another option for housing development. Local authorities are required to plan for a range of needs, including self-build. At the current time, there is a very low level of interest in self-build, and the proposal is to continue monitoring the situation for future consideration if appropriate. The register will be retained within the Planning Policy Department. Evidence of national policy development and more localised good practice will be updated on an annual basis within the Housing Service to determine whether further action is required.

#### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing

## Empty homes

Watford is a high demand area and there is not a large amount of empty residential property in the borough. Current analysis shows that those properties that have been unoccupied for 12 months or more are relatively evenly distributed throughout the borough, without a prominent concentration in one area. The council has previously dedicated resources to bringing empty residential properties into use. This activity is labour intensive and costly to the council and brought a low level of return. The decision to discontinue empty homes work in this form remains an appropriate position for the council.

A range of activity continues regarding any nuisance issues generated by empty properties. The council also has the opportunity to engage with the PLACE (Private Leasing Agreements Converting Empties) scheme where funding is available for property owners to bring their homes into use either for sale or to rent to clients nominated by the council. Negotiations are continuing regarding the terms of the scheme and whether this is a viable option for the council to pursue.

The council will still deal with empty homes on an individual basis when the empty home is having a negative impact on the neighbourhood in which it is located.

### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing
- Improving the condition and management of housing
- Key locations (wards and neighbourhoods)

## Supported Housing

In Watford there is a range of supported housing provision for a number of client groups including young people, those with mental health issues, experiencing substance misuse, with learning disabilities and experiencing domestic violence. Funding for the support element is provided through Housing Related Support which is commissioned by Herts County Council.

The council will seek active involvement in these commissioning decisions through Herts Heads of Housing and the Strategic Partnership Accommodation Board.

Due to reductions in the revenue funding available, it is not viable at the current time for the council to seek the development of new dedicated supported housing schemes for particular client groups. The council will continue to support our partners where they have viable proposals for such schemes either within new build accommodation or through private sector leasing, where they can demonstrate the needs of a certain client group over and above other potential uses. This will be informed by the market position statements on different client groups being produced by Hertfordshire County Council which are due to be published in 2015.

The use of council property assets to host supported housing schemes which are managed by the voluntary sector and registered providers will be reviewed under the WBC Property Review (see below). This will determine the extent to which WBC can continue to offer the accommodation element to supported housing schemes. The priority will be those schemes which serve Watford residents although an appropriate balance will be sought where WBC benefits from reciprocal arrangements with other boroughs.

#### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing
- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.

#### **Council property assets – capital, revenue and land**

The council has a small number of sites which could potentially be released for residential development. There are also properties currently used for temporary accommodation and commercial premises which could be put to alternative use. The Property Review will take into account competing demands for these assets and the potential for re-provision into more suitable or cost effective accommodation. The benefits of disposal will also be considered.

Depending on the outcome of the review, there may be opportunities for increasing and improving housing supply and condition. The council will develop an asset management strategy which will set out how council assets will be deployed in the future.

#### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing
- Improving the condition and management of housing.
- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.

#### **The Private Rented sector**



The council recognises the opportunities and the challenges of having a large private rented sector in the borough, which is likely to expand further during the lifetime of the Housing Strategy. The aim is to promote good quality, well managed private rented housing which will contribute positively to the health and wellbeing of our residents, and that acceptable standards are in place irrespective of the amount of rent paid by the occupants.

Our activity will be informed by a revised Private Sector Renewal Policy which will set out our approach to both owner occupied and rented housing and the advice, assistance and enforcement activity that will take place in the borough. Evidence of conditions in the private rented sector will be gained through an assessment of Watford's housing stock which will examine issues including energy

efficiency and the presence of hazards in the home, with an understanding of the profile of the stock and the residents so that targeted intervention can be planned.

The council will work proactively with landlords and tenants in order to ensure that the expected standards and responsibilities are well publicised and understood by both parties and appropriate action is taken to prevent issues from arising. Examples of required standards: elimination of category 1 hazards, complete compliance with the energy efficiency standards introduced under the Energy Act 2011. Areas for priority action have been identified relating to illegal and retaliatory eviction and overcrowding and the council is seeking to improve cross departmental working to ensure the best outcomes can be achieved for tenants and their landlords.

There are no plans to introduce an Accreditation scheme for privately rented accommodation. Research carried out across Hertfordshire has determined that this would not achieve effective outcomes in comparison with the level of resources required.

The council has developed a Private Sector Discharge Policy which will result in homeless applicants being re-housed in the private sector where the council has a duty to accommodate them. Activity to enable access to private sector tenancies as a homelessness prevention measure will also continue. In order to achieve these objectives, the council will seek increased partnership working with landlords and encourage the participation of the voluntary sector and registered providers in securing and managing homes for private rent which will meet the statutory requirements for private sector discharge of duty.

#### Relevant Themes

- Improving the condition and management of housing.
- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.
- Key locations (wards and neighbourhoods)

### **New housing for market sale**

The council encourages the development of well designed housing for the owner occupied market which will comprise a range of property sizes and types to meet the needs of our diverse community. It has been identified that the transition from a two bed property to a larger property can be problematic for families in terms of availability and affordability. At the same time, the availability of properties which are desirable to people wishing to downsize is also restricted (see section on older people below).

The council's capacity to intervene is limited. However measures have been identified where the council could take a more proactive role. These include engaging with registered providers to explore the potential for market sale in order to meet particular identified needs and ensuring a wider promotion of the opportunities presented by shared ownership and initiatives such as Help to Buy. This will involve a communication strategy which takes account of an audience outside the traditional housing service client group and the media used will need to reflect this wider remit.

#### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing
- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.

## **Affordable housing**

There is considerable pressure on the supply of affordable housing in Watford and the council is taking measures to make most effective use of this scarce resource. Policy changes will encourage a more planned exit from existing accommodation and a corresponding reduction in homelessness as well as promoting the private rented sector as a viable alternative to social housing.

A new Housing Nomination Policy was introduced in 2015 which ended the practice of holding an open housing register and set more restrictive criteria about which applicants may apply for social housing. This includes the requirement for applicants to be living in Watford and to have done so for five out of the last six years. There are also tighter restrictions regarding those who own properties or have sufficient means to meet their own housing need. Homeless households have a reduced priority on the register which aligns them with overcrowded households who have remained in the parental home. The council no longer accepts applications from those who are adequately housed and a more holistic advice offer will signpost them to alternative housing options.

The council retains a housing duty towards certain homeless clients who will not meet the criteria to join the housing register. A Private Sector Discharge Policy has been implemented in 2015 to enable the council to offer private rented properties to clients providing that the statutory requirements are met regarding property location, condition and management. This Policy also applies to applicants on the housing register subject to sufficient supply.

### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing
- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.

## **Homelessness prevention**

In developing its Homelessness Strategy, the council has committed to maintaining an agile and evidence based approach in reflection of the rapidly changing strategic and operational environment. The council will review its Homelessness Strategy on an annual basis in order to identify whether priorities and actions remain appropriate and deliverable.

The aim of the Strategy is to prevent homelessness wherever possible and to provide support to clients where homelessness does occur. It is not intended to document the vast range of services provided on a day to day basis, but rather outline the key priorities for improving and expanding existing provision.

The council remains committed to client groups outside of its statutory obligations including single homeless people who are not in priority need and those who are sleeping rough. We recognise the key role played by partners in delivering services which extend beyond the expertise and resources of the council and will continue to take an active role in leading the Prevention of Homelessness Partnership (PoSH) and supporting our partners in bidding for external funding. A particular focus is to ensure the provision of services to Watford residents and to ensure that these are prioritised where local resources are being deployed.

### Relevant Themes

- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.

## Provision of temporary accommodation

Under Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996 local authorities are obliged to provide temporary accommodation for homeless households who have no other home in which they can reasonably be expected to live.



The council will continue to investigate options to expand the amount and range of temporary accommodation available. Our aim is to accommodate households within the Watford borough where possible unless the household has a stated preference to seek housing in another area in which case assistance will be offered to achieve this in line with our statutory obligations. Where it is necessary to make a placement outside of the borough, the council will undertake to move the household back to Watford at the earliest opportunity. We are mindful of the cost and welfare implications of using bed and breakfast accommodation and will seek alternative solutions in order to reduce or eliminate its use in the longer term. It is a priority to the council to adhere to the six week statutory maximum period for bed and breakfast placements where households have children or a pregnant family member.

A particular need for wheelchair accessible housing has been identified to meet the needs of a full range of households in housing need including disabled persons – the council's own units are not wheelchair accessible. Between April 2011 and March 2014 a total of 17 persons whose priority need consisted of a physical disability were accepted for assistance under homelessness legislation.

### Relevant Themes

- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.

## Older people

There is a significant amount of designated older person's accommodation in Watford in both the social and private sectors. Some of this stock is now outdated and even more recent developments can fail to meet the aspirations of older residents who continue to work, drive and have family members to stay in their homes. It is noted that there has been a net outflow of the Watford population in the 60-74 age group to other boroughs.

The council will encourage the development of general needs housing which could be occupied by older people in preference to dedicated schemes which are restricted to older people only, if they are of a type which is already well represented within the housing stock. Applications are encouraged for development types which are currently under represented and are consistent with the Lifetime Home standard. The council has no evidence to suggest that there is a need for further residential care schemes in the borough at the current time and will work with Hertfordshire County Council towards the objective of avoiding the need for costly admissions to hospital and care placements through improved joined up working on prevention measures.

The council's current priority is to support the improvement of schemes which are no longer fit for purpose and ensure the provision of flexi care schemes which enable residents to remain in their home with varying levels of care and support according to their needs over time.

### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing.
- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.

## Disabled adaptations

The council has a statutory duty to administer Disabled Facilities Grants which assist with access to and within people's homes. The council will continue to commit funding from its own resources to complement the grant received via the Better Care Fund in order to meet local needs. In order to maximise resources, the council will encourage registered providers to fund adaptations within their own stock and will engage with the county wide project to examine the potential for joint procurement. It is recognised that the policy and procedures relating to Disabled Facilities Grants can be improved in order to ensure that pressing needs are met most effectively and this review will be undertaken as part of the development of the Private Sector Renewal Policy.

The council will continue to work closely with registered providers who are advertising adapted properties to let, in order to make best use of existing adaptations and minimise the need either to further adapt or remove adaptations wherever possible.

It is recognised that in some cases it might be more appropriate for a resident to move to other accommodation rather than remain in a home which will be adapted. Watford Council will continue to give consideration to schemes and resources to facilitate this, for example Relocation Grants. See the Needs Analysis for details of adaptations undertaken between January 2009 and March 2014.

### Relevant Themes

- Improving the condition and management of housing.
- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.

## Procurement and commissioning

Subject to funding constraints, the council will continue to commission services from external providers where additional expertise or capacity is required in order to deliver our strategic priorities and service requirements. Examples include the deployment of Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) homelessness prevention grant to fund work with high needs client groups and single homeless people. This activity will be evidence based and undertaken in accordance with the council's Contract Procedure Rules which incorporate the requirement to assess social value considerations. Social value is the consideration of how procurement might offer social, economic or environmental benefits to the community. The council will enter into contracts or service level agreements as appropriate and will undertake monitoring of performance in order to ensure the desired outcomes are being achieved and value can be demonstrated.

### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing.
- Improving the condition and management of housing.
- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.

## Empowerment of residents

The council is aiming to empower Watford residents to have a greater ability to resolve their own housing issues and make informed decisions.

### Relevant Themes

- Improving the supply of housing.
- Improving the condition and management of housing.
- Support to specific client groups where intervention is required.



## 6. Priorities – Evaluation Criteria

Where an area of activity is defined as being a priority in the Housing Strategy Action Plan, this means that resources, including staffing, project time and funding, will be directed towards achieving the associated objectives. Outcomes will be monitored and evaluated through a suite of indicators designed for this purpose.

The priorities and related tasks in the housing strategy action plan focus on either new schemes or projects, or improvements and expansions to existing schemes. They will not focus upon tasks and schemes which are already being implemented on a day-to-day basis.

Because of the discrete level of resources, the housing strategy action plan focuses upon priorities and tasks which have been identified as likely to have the most beneficial impact upon the Watford Housing Offer. The principles upon which high priority for resources and action have been chosen are:

### **Priority Selection criteria**

- a. A high level of recommendation from the evidence base and/or the consultation exercises.
- b. Identified gaps in provision for particular groups.
- c. Identified ability of certain projects/schemes/services to have a high impact in improving Watford's Housing Offer.
- d. The availability of resources to implement the task.

# Housing Strategy Action Plan 2015-2020

This strategy will be comprehensively reviewed and reassessed on an annual basis.

Theme one:- Improving the supply of Housing	
<b>Priority 1:</b>	<b>To influence the type of new housing that is provided by inputting into the Planning process and working with private sector providers and registered providers.</b>
<b>Task 1: Developing, testing and publicising annual dataset with conclusions to inform the housing mix</b>	<b>Project lead</b> Housing and Planning
	<b>Resources</b> Existing staffing
	<b>Timescale</b> Annually in January, then whenever required
	<b>Description of Project</b> To produce two information templates, one to focus on affordable housing and one to focus on the whole housing market. This will provide standardised data tools to be used by the Planning team. The content of the template will be revised and modified when appropriate.
	<b>Outputs</b> Completed data templates with conclusions and recommendations to assist in the consideration of planning applications for residential developments.
	<b>Outcomes</b> Outcomes of planning applications which are responsive to identified needs in Watford and planning policies.
<b>Task 2: Participate in the production of a Strategic Housing Market Assessment in partnership with neighbouring boroughs</b>	<b>Project lead</b> Planning and Housing
	<b>Project Team</b> Other Hertfordshire local authorities
	<b>Resources</b> From existing budgets
	<b>Timescale</b> Year 1 of the Housing Strategy
	<b>Description of Project</b> A cross-boundary housing research project to objectively assess housing needs in Watford and the surrounding area.
	<b>Outputs</b> Completion of a research project plus recommendations.
<b>Outcomes</b> Outcomes of planning applications which are responsive to identified needs in Watford and planning policies.	

<p><b>Priority 2:</b></p>	<p><b>Work with registered providers to achieve a balance between traditional social rented properties and new business which enables them to develop other types of homes , such as affordable rent, market rent, homes for sale.</b></p>
<p><b>Task 3:</b> To establish and maintain frameworks for engagement with registered provider partners, private developers and property owners. This will include information sharing, accessing funding and development opportunities, and local marketing initiatives.</p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing Supply Team</p> <p><b>Project Team</b> Housing Strategy</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing staff resources</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> Year 1 of the Housing Strategy</p>
	<p><b>Description of Project</b> To formalise liaison with registered providers in order to improve partnership working and increase the amount of registered provider activity in Watford.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> A prescribed number of meetings each year, and a definite set of plans from the meetings in order to improve partnership working.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> A high level of registered provider activity in Watford. A rate of affordable housing development in Watford that equals and exceeds corporate targets, and other housing development for which there is an identified need in Watford.</p>
	<p><b>Task 4:</b> Annual review of the Tenancy Strategy</p>
<p><b>Resources</b> Existing staff resources</p>	
<p><b>Timescale</b> Annually by December</p>	
<p><b>Description of Project</b> To revise the Tenancy Strategy to give guidance to registered providers on the council's expectations in terms of rent setting, types of tenancies granted and affordable housing provision for special needs groups.</p>	
<p><b>Outputs</b> A revised Tenancy Strategy devised with input from stakeholder organisations, giving clear guidance to registered providers.</p>	
<p><b>Outcomes</b> Rent levels and tenancies which are consistent with identified needs in Watford.</p>	

<b>Priority 3:</b>	<b>To contribute to the implementation of the council's forthcoming Asset Management strategy.</b>
<b>Task 5: Tasks to be defined pending outcome of Property Review.</b>	<b>Resources</b> To be confirmed
	<b>Timescale</b> Year 1 of Housing Strategy
	<b>Description of Project</b> These tasks will be set when the Property Review has been completed.
	<b>Outputs</b> To be confirmed
	<b>Outcomes</b> Making optimum use of corporate assets and resources and continuing to meet our statutory homelessness duties.
<b>Theme two:- Improving the condition and management of housing</b>	
<b>Priority 1:</b>	<b>To revise the Private Sector Renewal Policy (which includes grant and loan assistance) to make homes decent and adapt them for disabled access.</b>
<b>Task 1: Revise the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy</b>	<b>Project lead</b> Housing
	<b>Project team</b> Environmental Health
	<b>Resources</b> Existing staffing
	<b>Timescale</b> December 2015
	<b>Description of project</b> To produce a Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy which aims to maintain and improve housing conditions and support an accessible private housing sector, promotes health, safety and sustainability, provides assistance to those most in need, that complies with legislation and supports Watford Borough Council's corporate objectives. The policy will meet the challenges of a range of changing contexts, including:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High demand for services because of the characteristics of housing stock and residents.</li> <li>• The need for a service which is both property and people-based</li> <li>• A very diverse client base which presents challenges in devising bespoke solutions</li> <li>• Diminishing resources from Government.</li> <li>• A multiplicity of new funding opportunities</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Outputs</b> A new policy which prioritises the council’s activities and resources related to privately owned housing.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> The Private Sector Housing Renewal policy will assess the current system of grants and loans, and prioritise future activity in order to create the maximum beneficial impact from using corporate resources. It will aim to ensure improved housing conditions and associated health benefits.</p>
<p><b>Task 2: Initiatives to support residents promoted in revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health, Communications</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> December 2015 – April 2016</p>
	<p><b>Description of Project</b> To implement tasks arising from the revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> Good take-up of service resulting in improved housing conditions and associated health benefits.</p>
	<p><b>Priority 2:</b></p>
<p><b>Task 3: Production of a suite of advice and information material which covers the full range of services available</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health, Communications</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing budgets</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> April 2015</p>
	<p><b>Description of project</b> A comprehensive approach will be taken to assemble advice and information material for stakeholders of private sector housing.</p>

	<p><b>Outputs</b> A full range of information documents to be devised in an appropriate and accessible format, to be available in hard copy and on-line. To lead to a higher take-up of services. To be easily updated if required.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> Stakeholders in privately owned housing, including private landlords, private tenants and home owners, to have a higher level of knowledge of services available to them from the council.</p>
<p><b>Task 4: Publication of the above through websites, leaflets, roadshows, social media, advertising through lettings agents.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health, Communications</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing budgets</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> April to September 2015</p>
	<p><b>Description of Project</b> To ensure that information sources are available in a range of media in order to maximise accessibility.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> A full range of information documents to be devised in an appropriate and accessible format, to be available in hard copy and on-line. To lead to a higher take-up of services. To be easily updated if required.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> Stakeholders in privately owned housing, including private landlords, private tenants and home owners, to have a higher level of knowledge of services available to them from the council.</p>
<p><b>Task 5: Introduce a framework to enforce the Redress scheme and include compliance across council private sector access schemes.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Environmental Health</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Housing, Communications</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> September 2015</p>
	<p><b>Description of project</b> This project will ensure compliance with the Redress Schemes for Lettings Agency Work and Property Management Work (Requirement to Belong to a Scheme etc) (England) Order 2014. This Order requires persons who engage in letting agency work or property management work to belong to a redress scheme that has been approved by the Secretary of State or that has been designated as a government administered Redress scheme.</p>

	<p><b>Outputs</b> A framework will be devised to enforce the Redress scheme and ensure compliance across schemes managed by the council to improve access to the private rented sector among households in housing need.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> This project will ensure compliance with the Redress Schemes for Lettings Agency Work and Property Management Work (Requirement to Belong to a Scheme etc) (England) Order 2014.</p>
<b>Priority 3:</b>	<b>Improve the condition of the housing stock to enable the provision of safe, sustainable, healthy and well-maintained homes.</b>
<b>Task 6: Review Care and Repair Provision</b>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p>
	<p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health, Corporate Procurement, Legal</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing staff resources</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> December 2015</p>
	<p><b>Description of Project</b> Review current needs for the service and delivery options.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> Revision of in-house or external delivery options.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> Clients supported to access council funding for Disabled Facilities Grants and Decent Homes Assistance.</p>
<b>Priority 4:</b>	<b>Renew cross service procedures to improve the customer experience and effectiveness of casework on overcrowding and illegal/retaliatory eviction and harassment.</b>
<b>Task 7: Review the current scope and effectiveness of casework on overcrowding</b>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p>
	<p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing staff resources</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> September 2015</p>
	<p><b>Description of project</b> A comprehensive review of all work undertaken to deal with cases of overcrowding by Housing and Environmental Health and the results and outcomes from current procedures.</p>

	<p><b>Outputs</b> Research into procedures and results, with recommendations into changes to be made and the outcomes which are sought.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> An improved and co-ordinated service to assist residents who are experiencing overcrowding, with agreement on the outcomes which will be sought. Performance measures to be agreed.</p>
<p><b>Task 8: Implement action plan to develop our strategic and operational response to overcrowding.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> December 2015</p>
	<p><b>Description of Project</b> A plan to implement the tasks identified through the review of procedures to tackle overcrowding and to achieve the outcomes which are sought.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> Completion of the identified tasks.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> An improved and co-ordinated service to assist residents who are experiencing overcrowding, with agreement on the outcomes which will be sought. Performance measures to be agreed.</p>
	<p><b>Task 9: Investigate the need for a service to respond to illegal/retaliatory eviction and harassment.</b></p>
<p><b>Resources</b> Existing staffing</p>	
<p><b>Timescale</b> September 2015</p>	
<p><b>Description of project</b> A comprehensive review of all work undertaken to deal with cases of illegal/retaliatory eviction by Housing and Environmental Health and the results and outcomes from current procedures.</p>	
<p><b>Outputs</b> Research into procedures and results, with recommendations into changes to be made and the outcomes which are sought.</p>	

	<p><b>Outcomes</b> An improved and co-ordinated service to assist residents who are experiencing illegal/retaliatory eviction with agreement on the outcomes which will be sought. Performance measures to be agreed.</p>
<p><b>Task 10: Implement action plan to develop our strategic and operational response to illegal/ retaliatory eviction and harassment in order to minimise housing need.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health, Legal, Communications</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> December 2015</p>
	<p><b>Description of Project</b> A plan to implement the tasks identified through the review of procedures to tackle retaliatory eviction and to achieve the outcomes which are sought. To take account of any legislative changes.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> Completion of the identified tasks.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> An improved and co-ordinated service to assist residents who are experiencing retaliatory eviction, with agreement on the outcomes which will be sought. Performance measures to be agreed.</p>
	<p><b>Priority 5</b></p>
<p><b>To renew the evidence base through an assessment of Watford's housing stock which samples a range of homes and indicates the issues with stock which we need to address e.g. energy efficiency.</b></p>	
<p><b>Task 11: Commission a private sector stock condition survey/ model.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health, other Hertfordshire local authorities</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing budgets</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> December 2015</p>
	<p><b>Description of project</b> To commission a private sector stock condition survey to provide updated information on privately owned housing stock across Watford.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> A range of updated stock data on privately owned housing in Watford plus recommendations for priorities for action to inform appropriate policies and strategies.</p>

	<p><b>Outcomes</b> A sound information base to ensure that policies and strategies related to privately owned housing are responsive to Watford's needs and circumstances.</p>
<p><b>Task 12: Develop policy responses from the stock condition survey to inform appropriate policies, strategies and procedures.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing staffing</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> December 2015 - April 2016</p>
	<p><b>Description of Project</b> To implement the priorities for action as recommended by the Private Sector Stock Condition survey.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> To be agreed.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> A set of actions linked to the policies and strategies linked to privately owned housing which are responsive to Watford's needs and circumstances.</p>
<p><b>Task 13: Undertake Home Energy Efficiency publicity campaigns to raise awareness of the options which are available, and deliver improvements as recommended in local Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) reports.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Environmental Health</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Housing, Communications</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Description of project</b> To devise a plan to raise awareness of the options which are available to increase energy efficiency in the home.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> Increased take-up of energy efficiency schemes in Watford.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> A higher level of energy efficient housing stock in Watford. Beneficial impacts upon health.</p>

**Theme three:- Support to client groups where intervention is needed**

<b>Priority 1:</b>	<b>To carry out an annual review of the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan</b>
<b>Task 1: Review and publish annual update of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan</b>	<b>Project lead</b> Helen George, Housing Strategy Officer
	<b>Resources</b> Existing budgets, external funding opportunities to be identified
	<b>Timescale</b> End of October annually
	<b>Description of Project</b> To fulfil the undertaking to review and update the homelessness strategy and action plan on an annual basis in order to ensure it is responsive to the new issues which have arisen.
	<b>Outputs</b> Revised action plan drafted and approved Revised projects scoped and resources identified
	<b>Outcomes</b> Increased prevention of homelessness and effective tackling of homelessness when it occurs.
<b>Task 2: Implementation of the revised Homelessness Strategy Action Plan</b>	<b>Project lead</b> Housing Strategy
	<b>Resources</b> Existing budgets
	<b>Timescale</b> October to September, annually
	<b>Description of Project</b> To implement the tasks identified as appropriate for inclusion in each year's annual action plan. The tasks will be assigned to Housing Strategy, Housing Supply, Homelessness Prevention and Housing Options, and external organisations.
	<b>Outputs</b> Revised projects implemented.
	<b>Outcomes</b> Increased prevention of homelessness and effective tackling of homelessness when it occurs.
<b>Priority 2:</b>	<b>To Implement and monitor a revised Housing Nomination Policy and a Private Sector Discharge Policy including management of customer expectations.</b>
<b>Task 3: Implementation of the Housing Nominations Policy.</b>	<b>Project lead</b> Housing  <b>Project team</b> Customer Services Centre, Communications

	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing budgets</p> <p><b>Timescale</b> By September / October</p> <p><b>Description of Project</b> To implement the revised Housing Nomination Policy including changes to software, working procedures and communication material, and ensuring partner agencies and housing applicants receive the relevant training and support. To put in place appropriate monitoring on a quarterly basis of the housing register, associated lettings and impacts on homelessness and temporary accommodation occupancy rates.</p> <p><b>Outputs</b> Revised Policy published and implemented Revised software, working procedures and communication material Well trained staff and partner agencies Fully informed and supported clients</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b> A more tightly focused housing register and nominations to registered providers which reflects the needs of local people. A decrease in homelessness applications and an increase in planned move on from accommodation.</p>
<p><b>Priority 3:</b></p>	<p><b>To engage with private landlords with the aim of increasing the availability of privately rented homes for households in housing need.</b></p>
<p><b>Task 4: Development and Implementation of the Private Sector Discharge Policy</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Customer Services Centre, Communications, Environmental Health, Legal</p> <p><b>Resources</b> Existing budgets</p> <p><b>Timescale</b> By 1 April 2015</p> <p><b>Description of Project</b> To implement a Private Sector Discharge Policy which will enable the council to discharge its homelessness duty with the offer of a private rented tenancy. To establish initiatives and working procedures which will enable access to suitable properties which meet the statutory criteria. To put in place appropriate monitoring on a quarterly basis to assess the outcomes of the policy.</p> <p><b>Outputs</b> An approved Private Sector Discharge Policy Revised working procedures and communication material Well trained staff and partner agencies Fully informed and supported clients</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b> Increase in homelessness prevention Reduction in homelessness applications</p>

<b>Priority 4:</b>	<b>To devise plans to increase the supply of wheelchair accessible temporary accommodation for homeless households.</b>
<b>Task 5: To increase the supply of wheelchair accessible temporary housing.</b>	<b>Project lead</b> Housing  <b>Project Team</b> Corporate Procurement, Property
	<b>Resources</b> Existing staff resources
	<b>Timescale</b> Years 1-2 of the Housing Strategy
	<b>Description of Project</b> To provide an improved supply of temporary accommodation for homelessness applicants who have physical disabilities, to include wheelchair users. To ensure that they are living in accessible accommodation while awaiting the outcome of their homelessness application or the offer of suitable accommodation. To be guided on the appropriate level of accessibility by the Lifetime Homes standard and the Wheelchair Standard.
	<b>Outputs</b> A specified number of units.
	<b>Outcomes</b> An improved homelessness service for applicants who have physical disabilities.
<b>Priority 5:</b>	<b>Older people – support activity to improve registered provider sheltered housing to become Flexicare accommodation which will meet the current and future needs of Watford residents.</b>
<b>Task 6: Older people: agree decant protocol and associated allocation policies and criteria.</b>	<b>Project lead</b> Housing  <b>Project Team</b> Watford Community Housing Trust
	<b>Resources</b> Existing staff resources
	<b>Timescale</b> April 2015
	<b>Description of Project</b> To have in place the protocols and procedures to support the conversion of traditional sheltered housing schemes to Flexicare accommodation. Flexicare will provide a more adaptable housing options for older people.
	<b>Outputs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Decant proposal</li> <li>• The allocations policies and criteria required for letting the new accommodation.</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Outcomes</b> The successful integration of flexicare as part of Watford's spectrum of housing options for older people. Improved health and wellbeing among older people.</p>
<p><b>Theme four:- Key locations</b></p>	
<p><b>Priority 1:</b></p>	<p><b>To support the delivery of affordable housing within the Special Policy Areas.</b></p>
<p><b>Task 1: Work with Local Asset Based Vehicle (LABV) to procure a registered provider for the Health Campus.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Property, Housing</p>
	<p><b>Project team</b> Corporate Procurement, Legal</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing staff resources</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Description of Project</b> To contribute housing-related knowledge in order to guide the selection of a registered provider to acquire and manage the affordable housing stock on a major Special Policy Area, the Health Campus.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> The selection of a registered provider who satisfied all prescribed criteria for the acquisition and management of affordable housing on the Health Campus.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> As above.</p>
<p><b>Priority 2:</b></p>	<p><b>To implement targeted initiatives such as Street Improvement Projects which tackle a range of issues in specific areas, such as property condition, the environment and community safety concerns, through a multi-agency approach.</b></p>
<p><b>Task 2: Implement a pilot Street Improvement Project for a clearly defined neighbourhood in the borough.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health, Housing, Planning</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Description of project</b> An holistic project to improve the quality of the environment in specific neighbourhoods in Watford. As well as improvement to housing, the project will aim to improve the position with regard to the following: boundary walls, signage, wheelie bins, potholes and car parking.</p>

	<p><b>Outputs</b> A plan for the area, including a series of tasks to be carried out.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> Significant improvement in the environment in the area. Performance measures to be devised.</p>
<p><b>Theme five:- Well-being, Economy and Health</b></p>	
<p><b>Priority 1:</b></p>	<p><b>To undertake housing-related activity in line with health and well-being priorities for the borough, such as achieving “safe and healthy homes”. This will refer to the new Code for Sustainable Homes whose measures of sustainability include Health and Well-being.</b></p>
<p><b>Task 1: Undertake an assessment of Watford’s housing stock to better understand the housing conditions in Watford, and to ensure that health related data is identified in the house condition survey.</b></p> <p><b>(See Theme 2, Priority 4, Task 10).</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Environmental Health, other Hertfordshire local authorities</p> <p><b>Resources</b> Existing budgets</p> <p><b>Timescale</b> December 2015</p> <p><b>Description of project</b> To commission a private sector stock condition survey to provide updated information on privately owned housing stock across Watford.</p> <p><b>Outputs</b> A range of updated stock data on privately owned housing in Watford plus recommendations for priorities for action to inform appropriate policies and strategies. To focus particularly on health-related recommendations.</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b> A sound information base to ensure that policies and strategies related to privately owned housing are responsive to Watford’s needs and circumstances with regard to health issues.</p>
<p><b>Task 2: Undertake housing-related activity in line with health priorities for the borough, such as achieving “safe and healthy” homes, as informed by the above survey result.</b></p>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing, Environmental Health</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Communications</p> <p><b>Resources</b> Existing staffing resources</p> <p><b>Timescale</b> January 2016 to March 2016</p> <p><b>Description of project</b> To be confirmed after the completion of the Private Sector Health Condition Survey.</p>

	<p><b>Outputs</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> Improved housing conditions with positive health and safety impacts.</p>
<b>Priority 2:</b>	<b>Undertake housing related activity to support economic growth in Watford in consultation with Watford's business community.</b>
<b>Task 3: To support emerging initiatives in the council's forthcoming economic development strategy by researching housing-related situations and potential interventions.</b>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing Strategy</p>
	<p><b>Project team</b> Economic Development, Transport</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing staff resources</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> Year 1 of the Housing Strategy</p>
	<p><b>Description of project</b> To provide an information bank to allow housing-related information to contribute to other policy areas e.g. transport, economic development. To allow housing-related information to support funding bids for new schemes/projects.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> A standard template on housing-related information, to be reassessed and updated in consultation with stakeholder organisations.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> Effective housing-related support for regeneration initiatives in Watford.</p>
<b>Theme six:- Communication and community engagement</b>	
<b>Priority 1:</b>	<p>To develop a co-ordinated communications strategy for housing-related issues in Watford to achieve the following:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convey a range of messages, such expectations on the availability of affordable housing for rent, on a range of housing options, on sources of housing-related assistance, on housing-related support services, and to improve perceptions of a range of housing options.</li> <li>• To communicate information to meet the requirements, expectations and aspirations of a range of ages and demographic groups, and to communicate with more "difficult to reach" groups such as young people, vulnerable people.</li> <li>• To be receptive to existing and new technological options for communications</li> </ul>
<b>Task 1: Develop the communications strategy for housing</b>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing, Communications</p> <p><b>Project team</b> Planning, Environmental Health, Customers Services, Revenues and Benefits</p>

	<p><b>Resources</b> Existing staff resources</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> Years 1 of the Housing Strategy</p>
	<p><b>Description of Project</b> To produce a new Communications strategy in recognition of the changing customer base and the new expectations of communications e.g. use of the Social Media, and also in recognition of the essential role which a lack of effective communication plays in driving up homelessness and housing need, and ineffective use of affordable housing stock.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> A housing communications strategy for Watford, defining what we wish to achieve and the tasks which will implement the strategy.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> Reduced homelessness and housing need, and good take-up of new and existing housing options. Positive engagement of the community on issues relating to housing growth.</p>
<b>Task 2: Implement the communications strategy for housing</b>	<p><b>Project lead</b> Housing Strategy</p>
	<p><b>Project Team</b> Communications, Planning, Environmental Health, Customers Services, Revenues and Benefits</p>
	<p><b>Resources</b> To be confirmed</p>
	<p><b>Timescale</b> Years 1-2 of the Housing Strategy</p>
	<p><b>Description of Project</b> Implementation of the tasks included in the housing strategy.</p>
	<p><b>Outputs</b> Completion of the tasks including in the housing strategy.</p>
	<p><b>Outcomes</b> Reduced homelessness and housing need, and good take-up of new and existing housing options. Positive engagement of the community on issues relating to housing growth.</p>
<b>Priority 2:</b>	<b>To devise an approach to community engagement on housing growth issues, in partnership with registered providers.</b>

<b>Task 3:</b> <b>To devise an approach to community engagement on housing growth issues, in partnership with registered providers.</b>	<b>Project lead</b> Housing, Regeneration and Development.
	<b>Project team</b> Communications, Partnerships and Performance
	<b>Resources</b> Existing staff resources
	<b>Timescale</b> Years 1 of the Housing Strategy
	<b>Description of Project</b> To be confirmed.
	<b>Outputs</b> Revised framework for community engagement.
	<b>Outcomes</b> Positive engagement from the community relating to housing growth.

# Glossary

**2011 Census** – A national survey of all people and households in the United Kingdom, last carried out on 27 March 2011.

**Accessible housing** – Accessible housing refers to the construction or modification of housing to enable independent living for persons with physical or visual impairment. Accessibility is achieved both through design and adaptations.

**Affordable Housing** - Affordable housing is the sum of Social Rent, Intermediate/Affordable Rent and Low Cost Home Ownership. New affordable homes are defined in line with Planning Policy Statement 3 as additional housing units (or bedspaces) provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

**Affordable Rent** – introduced as a new type of rent by the Homes and Communities Agency in February 2011. Affordable Rented housing is let by registered providers of social housing to households who are eligible for social rented housing. Affordable Rent is not subject to the national rent regime but is subject to other rent controls that require a rent of no more than 80 per cent of the local market rent. Revenue from Affordable Rents can be used to fund affordable housing development. Registered providers are given permission to use Affordable Rents for their development programmes by the Homes and Communities Agency. Affordable Rents can be created either by the development of new affordable housing or the conversion of existing affordable housing when it is relet.

**Better Care Fund** – The Better Care Fund is a pooled budget for health and social care services, shared between the National Health Services and local authorities, to deliver better outcomes and integrated services for older and disabled people. Disabled Facilities Grants are funded through the Better Care Fund.

**Choice-based lettings** – Choice-based lettings is a method of allocating affordable housing for rent which has mainly been adopted by local authorities in the United Kingdom since 2000. The Choice-based lettings system is usually characterised by the following three features:

- All households who wish to be allocated affordable housing for rent must apply to join a housing register through which their priority for housing will be assessed.
- All properties which are available for letting will be advertised.
- Households on the housing register can express their wish to be allocated a property through “bidding” for it. Of all bidding households, the household with the highest priority is offered the property.

**Communities and Local Government** – The Government department responsible for overseeing affordable housing provision and homelessness reduction.

**Community Infrastructure Levy (CILs)** – The Community Infrastructure levy is a new levy that local authorities in England and Wales can choose to charge on new developments in their area. The levy mostly replaces the system of agreeing planning obligations between local councils and developers under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, although the system of Section 106 agreements remains in place for the negotiation of the provision of affordable housing.

**Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)** – Disabled Facilities Grants are means tested grants that enable the home of home owners and private tenants who have some form of physical or sensory impairment to be adapted to meet their needs. The disabled occupant must agree to live in the property for a certain period after the works are completed, unless health reasons mean they will live in the property for a shorter time.

**Duty to Co-operate** – The Duty to Co-operate was created by the Localism Act 2011. It places a legal duty on local planning authorities, county councils in England and public bodies to engage constructively, acting on an ongoing basis to maximise the effectiveness of Local Plan preparation in the context of strategic cross boundary matters.

**Homes and Communities Agency** – The Government organisation which regulates the activities of registered providers, including their affordable housing development programmes.

**Housing-related support** – Housing-related support services are defined as services that aim to develop or sustain an individual’s capacity to live independently in accommodation. Housing-related support services are not general health, social care or statutory personal care services, but services which aim to support independent living arrangements. Housing-related support services in Watford are funded by a grant which is administered by Hertfordshire County Council.

**Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)** – this term refers to residential property where “common areas” exist and are shared by more than one household. Common areas may be bathrooms or kitchens, but can also be stairwells and landings. HMOs can be divided into self-contained flats or bedsits, or consist of lodgings. HMOs differ from purpose-built blocks of flats since most will have been converted from a large building originally intended for use by a single household.

**Housing Benefit** – Means-tested financial assistance to meet housing costs for tenants of the social rented sector. Under the Localism Act 2012 Housing Benefit will become part of the new Universal Credit payment.

**Housing Register** – The register of people applying for homes owned and/or managed by registered providers.

**Local Asset Backed Vehicle (LABV)** – A LABV is a distinct legal entity, characterised by joint equal representation on the Board by the public and private sector partners. In return for the public sector transferring its assets into the partnership, the private sector partner will inject finance, technical expertise and a capability to deliver.

**Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)** – Local Enterprise Partnerships are partnerships between local authorities and businesses. They decide what the priorities should be for investment in infrastructure and economic development in their area.

**Local Housing Allowance** – Means-tested financial assistance to meet housing costs for tenants of the private rented sector.

**Localism Act 2011** – The Localism Act 2011 received Royal Assent in November 2011. The housing-related provisions are:

- Local authorities have the freedom to determine who will qualify to go on their housing register.
- Local authorities will have the flexibility to bring the homelessness duty to an end with an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector without requiring the household’s agreement.
- Local authorities have an obligation to publish a tenancy strategy setting out, for their local authority areas, the tenancies which should be granted and the rent levels which will be expected.
- Local authorities have the power to offer flexible tenancies to new social tenants. A flexible tenancy is a tenancy for a fixed term.

**Low cost home ownership** – Low cost home ownership is the sale of homes at prices below market level. They can combine sale and rent, or can incorporate a low interest equity loan which reduces the cost of monthly repayments.

**Registered provider (RP)** – also known as a housing association or registered social landlord (RSL), a landlord of affordable housing who is registered with the Homes and Communities Agency.

**Section 106 agreement** – A Section 106 agreement is a legal agreement (similar to a covenant) which provides a means of ensuring that private housing developers contribute towards the infrastructure that is required to make a development acceptable in planning terms. Contributions may be either financial or in kind, and may consist of affordable housing.

**Social rented housing** – Social rented housing is rented housing which is owned and managed by local authorities and registered providers, for which guideline target rents are determined through the national rent regime. A Social Rent is usually 50% to 60% of full market rent.

**Special Policy Areas** – The Core Strategy, part of Watford’s new Local Plan, identifies a number of “Special Policy Areas” (SPAs) which form an important part of the spatial strategy. Each of these areas has a separate policy.

**Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs)** – Strategic Housing Market Assessments are cross-boundary housing research projects. They are designed to enable local authorities to think spatially about the nature and influence of the housing markets in respect to their local area, and to provide robust evidence to inform policies aimed at providing the right mix of housing across the whole housing market – both market and affordable housing.

**Temporary Accommodation** – Under Section 188 of the Housing Act 1997, if a local authority has reason to believe that a household may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need, they should ensure that accommodation is available on a temporary basis pending a decision as to what the duty is to the households under homelessness legislation. The local authority may also provide accommodation while the homelessness applicant is awaiting an offer of suitable housing.

