

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	
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.
Task 1: Developing, testing and publicising annual dataset with conclusions to inform the housing mix.	Project lead Housing and Planning
	Project Team
	Resources Existing staffing
	Timescale Annually in January.
	Description of Project 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.
	Outputs Completed data templates with conclusions and recommendations to assist in the consideration of planning applications for residential developments.
Outcomes	

	Outcomes of planning applications which are responsive to identified needs in Watford and planning policies.
Task 2: Participate in the production of a Strategic Housing Market Assessment in partnership with neighbouring boroughs.	<p>Project Lead Planning and Housing</p> <p>Project Team Other Hertfordshire local authorities</p> <p>Resources From existing budgets.</p> <p>Timescale Year 1 of the Housing Strategy.</p> <p>Description of Project A cross-boundary housing research project to objectively assess housing needs in Watford and the surrounding area.</p> <p>Outputs Completion of a research project plus recommendations.</p> <p>Outcomes Outcomes of planning applications which are responsive to identified needs in Watford and planning policies.</p>
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.
Task 3:- To establish and maintain	Project lead Housing Supply Team

<p>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>Project Team Housing Strategy</p>
	<p>Resources Staffing</p>
	<p>Timescale Year 1 of the Housing Strategy.</p>
	<p>Description of project To formalise liaison with registered providers in order to improve partnership working and increase the amount of registered provider activity in Watford.</p>
	<p>Outputs A prescribed number of meetings each year, and a definite set of plans from the meetings in order to improve partnership working.</p>
	<p>Outcomes 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>Task 4: Annual review of the Tenancy Strategy</p>	<p>Project lead Housing Strategy Officer</p>
	<p>Resources Existing staffing</p>
	<p>Timescale Annually by December.</p>

	<p>Description of project 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>Outputs A revised Tenancy Strategy devised with input from stakeholder organisations, giving clear guidance to registered providers.</p>
	<p>Outcomes Rent levels and tenancies which are consistent with identified needs in Watford.</p>
<p>Priority 3:</p>	<p>To contribute to the implementation of the council's forthcoming Asset Management strategy.</p>
<p>Task 5: Tasks to be defined pending outcome of Property Review.</p>	<p>Resources To be confirmed</p>
	<p>Timescale Year 1 of Housing Strategy</p>
	<p>Description of project These tasks will be set when the Property Review has been completed.</p>
	<p>Outputs To be confirmed</p>
	<p>Outcomes Making optimum use of corporate assets and resources and continuing to meet our statutory homelessness duties.</p>

Theme two:- Improving the condition and management of housing

Priority 1: To revise the Private Sector Renewal Policy (which includes grant and loan assistance) to make homes decent and adapt them for disabled access.

Task 1: Revise the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy

Project lead
Housing.

Project team
Environmental Health

Resources

Existing staffing

Timescale

December 2015.

Description of project

To produce a Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy which aims to maintain and improve housing conditions, and support an accessible private housing sector that promotes health, safety and sustainability, that provides assistance to those most in need, that complies with legislation, and that supports Watford Borough Council's corporate objectives. The policy will meet the challenges of a range of changing contexts, including:-

- High demand for services because of the characteristics of housing stock and residents.
- The need for a service which is both property- and people-based
- A very diverse client base so challenges in devising bespoke solutions
- Diminishing resources from Government.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A multiplicity of new funding opportunities <p>Outputs A new policy which prioritises the council's activities and resources related to privately owned housing.</p> <p>Outcomes 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>Task 2: Initiatives to support residents promoted in revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.</p>	<p>Project lead Housing</p> <p>Project team Environmental Health, Communications</p> <p>Resources To be confirmed</p> <p>Timescale December 2015 – April 2016</p> <p>Description of project To implement tasks arising from the revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.</p> <p>Outputs To be confirmed</p> <p>Outcomes Good take-up of service resulting in improved housing conditions and associated health benefits.</p>

<p>Priority 2:</p>	<p>Increase awareness of letting agents, private landlords and tenants regarding acceptable standards, responsibilities and remedies, in order to empower them to make informed choices.</p>
<p>Task 3: Production of a suite of advice and information material which covers the full range of services available</p>	<p>Project lead Housing</p> <p>Project team Environmental Health, Communications.</p> <p>Resources Identified from Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Homelessness Grant.</p> <p>Timescale April 2015</p> <p>Description of project A comprehensive approach will be taken to assemble advice and information material for stakeholders of private sector housing.</p> <p>Outputs 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>Outcomes 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>Task 4: Publication of the above through websites,</p>	<p>Project lead Housing</p>

<p>leaflets, roadshows, social media, advertising through lettings agents.</p>	<p>Project team Environmental Health, Communications</p>
	<p>Resources Identified from Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) homelessness grant.</p>
	<p>Timescale April to September 2015.</p>
	<p>Description of project To ensure that information sources are available in a range of media in order to maximise accessibility.</p>
	<p>Outputs 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>Outcomes 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>Task 5 – Introduce a framework to enforce the Redress scheme and include compliance across council private sector access schemes.</p>	<p>Project lead Environmental Health</p>
	<p>Project team Housing, Communications</p>
	<p>Resources To be confirmed</p>
	<p>Timescale September 2015</p>
	<p>Description of project 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</p>

	as a government administered redress scheme.
	<p>Outputs 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>Outcomes 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>
Priority 3	Improve the condition of the housing stock to enable the provision of safe, sustainable, healthy and well-maintained homes.
Task 6: Review Care and Repair Provision	<p>Project lead Housing</p>
	<p>Project team Environmental Health, Corporate Procurement, Legal.</p>
	<p>Resources Existing staff resources</p>
	<p>Timescale December 2015</p>
	<p>Description of project Review current needs for the service and delivery options.</p>
	<p>Outputs Revision of in-house or external delivery options.</p>
	<p>Outcomes Clients supported to access council funding for Disabled Facilities Grants and Decent Homes Assistance.</p>

Priority 4	Renew cross service procedures to improve the customer experience and effectiveness of casework on overcrowding and illegal/retaliatory eviction and harassment.
Task 7: Review the current scope and effectiveness of casework on overcrowding	<p>Project lead Housing,</p> <p>Project team Environmental Health</p> <p>Resources Existing staffing</p> <p>Timescale September 2015</p> <p>Description of project 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>Outputs Research into procedures and results, with recommendations into changes to be made and the outcomes which are sought.</p> <p>Outcomes 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>
Task 8: Implement action plan to develop our strategic and operational response to overcrowding.	<p>Project lead Housing</p> <p>Project team Environmental Health</p>

	<p>Resources To be confirmed.</p> <p>Timescale December 2015.</p> <p>Description of project 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>Outputs Completion of the identified tasks.</p> <p>Outcomes 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>Task 9: Investigate the need for a service to respond to illegal/retaliatory eviction and harassment.</p>	<p>Project lead Housing</p> <p>Project team Environmental Health, Legal</p> <p>Resources Existing staffing</p> <p>Timescale September 2015.</p> <p>Description of project 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>Outputs Research into procedures and results, with recommendations into changes to be made and the outcomes which are sought.</p> <p>Outcomes 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>Task 10: Implement action plan to develop our strategic and operational response to illegal/retaliatory eviction and harassment in order to minimise housing need..</p>	<p>Project lead Housing</p> <p>Project team Environmental Health, Legal, Communications</p> <p>Resources To be confirmed</p> <p>Timescale December 2015.</p> <p>Description of project 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>Outputs Completion of the identified tasks.</p> <p>Outcomes</p>

	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.
Priority 5	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.
Task 11: Commission a private sector stock condition survey/model.	Project lead Housing.
	Project team Environmental Health, other Hertfordshire local authorities.
	Resources To be confirmed. £100,000 bid for Capital Programme pending approval.
	Timescale December 2015
	Description of project To commission a private sector stock condition survey to provide updated information on privately owned housing stock across Watford.
	Outputs A range of updated stock data on privately owned housing in Watford plus recommendations for priorities for action to inform appropriate policies and strategies.
	Outcomes A sound information base to ensure that policies and strategies related to privately owned housing are responsive to Watford's needs and circumstances.

Task 12: Develop policy responses from the stock condition survey to inform appropriate policies, strategies and procedures.	Project lead Housing.
	Project team Environmental Health
	Resources Existing staffing.
	Timescale December 2015 - April 2016.
	Description of project To implement the priorities for action as recommended by the Private Sector Stock Condition survey.
	Outputs To be agreed.
	Outcomes A set of actions linked to the policies and strategies linked to privately owned housing which are responsive to Watford's needs and circumstances.
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.	Project lead Environmental Health
	Project team Housing, Communications
	Resources
	Timescale

<i>(This task is still under discussion).</i>	Description of project To devise a plan to raise awareness of the options which are available to increase energy efficiency in the home.
	Outputs Increased take-up of energy efficiency schemes in Watford.
	Outcomes A higher level of energy efficient housing stock in Watford. Beneficial impacts upon health

Theme three:- Support to client groups where intervention is needed	
Priority 1	To carry out an annual review of the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan
Task 1: Review and publish annual update of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan	Project lead Helen George, Housing Strategy Officer
	Resources Existing budgets, DCLG homelessness grant, external funding opportunities to be identified
	Timescale End of October annually
	Description of project 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.

	<p>Outputs Revised action plan drafted and approved Revised projects scoped and resources identified</p>
	<p>Outcomes Increased prevention of homelessness and effective tackling of homelessness when it occurs.</p>
Task 2: Implementation of the revised Homelessness Strategy Action Plan	<p>Project lead Housing Strategy</p>
	<p>Resources Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Homelessness Grant</p>
	<p>Timescale October to September, annually</p>
	<p>Description of project 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.</p>
	<p>Outputs Revised projects implemented.</p>
	<p>Outcomes Increased prevention of homelessness and effective tackling of homelessness when it occurs.</p>
Priority 2	To Implement and monitor a revised Housing Nomination Policy and a Private Sector Discharge Policy including management of customer expectations.
Task 3:	Project lead

Implementation of the Housing Nominations Policy.	Housing Project team Customer Services Centre, Communications
	Resources Existing budgets, DCLG Prevention of Homelessness Grant
	Timescale By 1 April 2015
	Description of project 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.
	Outputs Revised Policy published and implemented Revised software, working procedures and communication material Well trained staff and partner agencies Fully informed and supported clients
	Outcomes 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.
Priority 3:	To engage with private landlords with the aim of increasing the availability of privately rented homes for households in housing need.
Task 4:	Project lead:

Development and Implementation of the Private Sector Discharge Policy	Housing
	Project team: Customer Services Centre, Communications, Environmental Health, Legal.
	Resources: Existing budgets, DCLG homelessness grant
	Timescale: By 1 April 2015
	Description of project: 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.
	Outputs: An approved Private Sector Discharge Policy Revised working procedures and communication material Well trained staff and partner agencies Fully informed and supported clients
Outcomes: Increase in homelessness prevention Reduction in homelessness applications	
Priority 4:	To devise plans to increase the supply of wheelchair accessible temporary accommodation for homeless households
Task 5: To increase the supply of wheelchair accessible temporary	Project lead: Housing

housing.	Project team: Corporate Procurement, Property.
	Resources: Staffing
	Timescale: Years 1-2 of the Housing Strategy.
	Description of project: 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.
	Outputs: A specified number of units.
	Outcomes: An improved homelessness service for applicants who have physical disabilities.
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.
Task 6: Older people: agree decant protocol and associated allocation policies and criteria.	Project lead: Housing
	Project Team: Watford Community Housing Trust.
	Resources:
	Timescale: April 2015.
	Description of project: To 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.
	Outputs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Decant proposal • The allocations policies and criteria required for letting the new accommodation.
	Outcomes: The successful integration of flexicare as part of Watford's spectrum of housing options for older people. Improved health and wellbeing among older people.

Theme four:- Key locations	
Priority 1:	To support the delivery of affordable housing within the Special Policy Areas.
Task 1: Work with Local Asset Based Vehicle (LABV) to procure a registered provider for the Health Campus.	Project lead: Property, Housing
	Project team: Corporate Procurement, Legal
	Resources
	Timescale To be confirmed.
	Description of project 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.
	Outputs

	The selection of a registered provider who satisfied all prescribed criteria for the acquisition and management of affordable housing on the Health Campus.
	Outcomes As above.
Priority 2:	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.
Task 2: Implement a pilot Street Improvement Project for a clearly defined neighbourhood in the borough.	Project leads: To be confirmed
	Project team: Environmental Health, Housing, Planning.
	Resources: To be confirmed
	Timescale: To be confirmed
	Description of project: 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.
	Outputs: A plan for the area, including a series of tasks to be carried out.
	Outcomes: Significant improvement in the environment in the area. Performance measures to be devised.

Theme five:- Well-being, Economy and Health

Priority 1:

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.

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.

(See Theme 2, Priority 4, Task 10).

Project lead

Housing

Project team

Environmental Health, other Hertfordshire local authorities.

Resources

To be confirmed. £100,000 bid for Capital Programme pending approval.

Timescale

December 2015

Description of project

To commission a private sector stock condition survey to provide updated information on privately owned housing stock across Watford.

Outputs

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>Outcomes 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>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.</p>	<p>Project lead Housing, Environmental Health</p>
	<p>Project team Communications</p>
	<p>Resources Existing staffing resources.</p>
	<p>Timescale January 2016 to March 2016.</p>
	<p>Description of project To be confirmed after the completion of the Private Sector Health Condition Survey.</p>
	<p>Outputs To be confirmed.</p>
	<p>Outcomes Improved housing conditions with positive health and safety impacts.</p>
<p>Priority 2</p>	<p>Undertake housing related activity to support economic growth in Watford in consultation with Watford's business community.</p>
<p>Task 3: To support emerging initiatives in the council's forthcoming economic development</p>	<p>Project lead Housing Strategy</p> <p>Project Team</p>

strategy by researching housing-related situations and potential interventions.	Economic Development, Transport.
	Resources Staffing
	Timescale Year 1 of the Housing Strategy.
	Description of project 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.
	Outputs A standard template on housing-related information, to be reassessed and updated in consultation with stakeholder organisations.
	Outcomes Effective housing-related support for regeneration initiatives in Watford.

Theme Six:- Communication and community engagement	
Priority 1:	<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"> • Convey a range of messages, such expectations on the availability of affordable

	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • To be receptive to existing and new technological options for communications
<p>Task 1: Develop the communications strategy for housing</p>	<p>Project lead Housing, Communications</p> <p>Project team Planning, Environmental Health, Customers Services, Revenues and Benefits.</p> <p>Resources Existing staff resources</p> <p>Timescale Year 1 of the Housing Strategy.</p> <p>Description of project 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 homelessness and housing need, and ineffective use of affordable housing stock.</p> <p>Outputs A housing communications strategy for Watford, defining what we wish to achieve and the tasks which will implement the strategy.</p> <p>Outcomes</p>

	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.
Task 2: Implement the communications strategy for housing	Project lead Housing Strategy
	Project team Communications, Planning, Environmental Health, Customers Services, Revenues and Benefits
	Resources To be confirmed.
	Timescale Years 1-2 of the Housing Strategy.
	Description of project Implementation of the tasks included in the housing strategy.
	Outputs Completion of the tasks including in the housing strategy.
	Outcomes 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.
Priority 2	To devise an approach to community engagement on housing growth issues, in partnership with registered providers
Task 3: To devise an approach to community engagement on housing growth issues, in partnership with registered providers.	Project lead Housing, Regeneration and Development.
	Project team Communications, Partnerships and Performance
	Resources Existing staff resources.
	Timescale Year 1 of the Housing Strategy.

	Description of project To be confirmed.
	Outputs Revised framework for community engagement.
	Outcomes Positive engagement from the community relating to housing growth.