

## **Introduction**

1. On the 15 December 2011 Cabinet approved the following Housing Strategy objectives and proposed policy options taking account of the changing housing policy environment. These objectives were formulated following a summer 2011 roadshow accompanied by a booklet explaining all the policy changes and potential implications for a variety of households in Harrow. Consultation questionnaires were completed and also made available through the Council's website. The intention was to reach a wider audience than in the past where consultation was primarily achieved through holding a conference event to which there were limited invitations. A number of community based events were held at various locations across the borough and questionnaires were completed by people living across the full range of housing tenures in Harrow. The main outcomes from this consultation are summarised as follows:

- Many people will need to move in the future and particularly those living in the private rented sector. Those living in the private rented sector were concerned about its lack of long term security and the detrimental impact on families, support systems etc.
- Over 80% of respondents think there is a need for more affordable housing for rent and this should be affordable to those who are working. There were mixed views on how much rents should be increased for new affordable housing, to enable the continued development of new affordable housing under the new funding regime. 37% agreed we should increase rents on all new homes by a small amount. 34% that rents should be kept at current levels and 29% that rents should be increased to the maximum allowed (80% of market rents).
- 77% of respondents stated that Harrow should continue to help people into home ownership and those who were not already home owners were interested in shared ownership as an alternative to privately renting.
- People recognise the problem of unaffordable housing in Harrow and 59% accepted that, for some people, it may prove a better option to move out of Harrow to find suitable accommodation **provided** no-one is forced to move against their will and provided that consideration is given to family networks, support needs etc.
- 58% of people questioned agreed it would be fair to introduce the government's new fixed term tenancies (e.g. for 5 years) in Harrow's social housing, to help increase the availability of affordable homes to those who most need it. However, many people pointed out that tenancy reviews at the end of the fixed term would need to be undertaken fairly, to take account of individual circumstances and wider community sustainability. 90% felt that older people and those with disabilities should be offered longer tenancies/ tenancies for life. There is also a common view from existing tenants that there would be no incentive to downsize to a smaller property if this were to be offered as a fixed term tenancy at a higher rent.
- There was support for the housing allocation policy to recognise the needs of people in low paid employment as well as the housing needs of homeless families, overcrowded households and those with medical needs. 26% felt that priority for

affordable housing should be given to people in low paid employment. 83% of respondents agreed that the council should continue to provide help to all homeless people to find a home in the private sector.

- 85% of respondents felt that the council should try to encourage higher standards in the private rented sector, with examples being given of situations where standards were unsatisfactory.
2. The agreed objectives are set out below together with progress against the action plan. The draft Housing Strategy is in the process of being written in preparation for consultation.

### Agreed Objectives

1. **Deliver excellent services shaped and valued by our communities** – we are developing this strategy in consultation with the community. This is the current overarching vision for the Housing Ambition Plan and is the driver for working with tenants, leaseholders and residents to improve services and involve residents in responding to national policy changes.
2. **Increase the supply of housing, including locally affordable housing and make best use of the existing social housing stock** – A reasonable supply of good quality affordable housing for rent, especially family housing, is vital to meet the needs of some households who are priced out of the private sector housing market in Harrow. Delivery of new affordable housing is dependent on the overall supply of new housing which is itself constrained by other financial requirements including the need to deliver social and physical infrastructure. The Core Strategy and related documents set out the Councils vision for growth and how this can enable a continued supply of affordable housing. However given the difficult economic climate and competing priorities consideration needs to be given to the commercial requirements of private developers and housing associations in order to maximise the overall supply. Therefore allowing some increase in rents beyond current target rents for new social housing may be a necessary option to encourage and stimulate supply. Whilst we aim to build as much additional affordable housing in Harrow as we can we know this will never meet all needs and therefore our existing social housing stock must be targeted at those who most need it.

Action	Progress
1. Model potential supply from current and future land and resources including sites identified in the Core Strategy and Area Action Plan and HRA land	Ongoing in consultation with the LDF team
2. Consider options for Council house building including Special Purpose Vehicles (SPV's).	Initial meetings held
3. Undertake further modelling work on the maximum rents that could be charged per bed size whilst maintaining local affordability to maximise the value of affordable housing in Harrow.	Rent levels have been reviewed with RPs and the draft Tenancy Strategy sets out the Council's proposed approach to the maximum level of rents per bed size.

<p>4. Continue to make best use of available grant funding for example to bring empty homes back into use Review current grant schemes and external funding opportunities – Empty Homes Grants, Better Home Grants. (NB. The maximum benefit of this will be achieved if the capital bid is confirmed)</p>	<p>Capital bid confirmed and revised scheme details agreed.</p> <p>Sub regional funding confirmed</p>
<p>5. Continue to make best use of empty homes and enhance Help2Let scheme - Review current grant schemes and external funding opportunities – Empty Homes Grants, Better Home Grants. (NB. The maximum benefit of this will be achieved if the capital bid is confirmed)</p>	<p>See above. Pilot grant scheme introduced to assist Help2Let landlords</p>
<p>5. Review options being developed elsewhere to encourage institutional investment in the PRS and consider applicability for Harrow – linked to use of land resources. Review Temporary to Permanent acquisition model Model potential supply and outcomes</p>	<p>Initial meetings held.</p>

**3. Continue to tackle homelessness by improving access to, and improving standards in the private rented sector** – The social housing sector will never be big enough to meet all the current and future demand for affordable housing. The private rented sector will continue to provide the most likely housing solution for most households and we therefore need to see what we can do to stimulate this sector especially at the lower end of the market, to encourage more stability and to facilitate better standards and longer tenancies.

Action	Progress
<p>1. Discharge of homelessness duty into private rented sector - Model impact as compared to the current policy of encouraging applicants to accept private rented sector housing - Determine measures to be adopted in policy to eliminate/reduce any adverse equality impacts.</p>	<p>In the process of responding to government consultation on the standards and suitability of private rented accommodation</p> <p>Initial impact modelling undertaken and presented to Voluntary Sector Forum May 2012 for discussion</p> <p>Details will be set out in the Homelessness Strategy</p>
<p>2. Moves out of Harrow/London where economic solutions do not exist in Harrow - Further develop options and model impact - Determine measures to be adopted in policy to eliminate/reduce any adverse equality impacts.</p>	<p>See above</p>
<p>3. Consider options for enabling and/or enforcing improved standards in the</p>	<p>Review underway and details will be set out in the Private Sector Housing Strategy</p>

private rented sector. -Review impact of increased enforcement on supply of private rented housing versus enabling measures	
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**4. Enhanced housing options, promoting mobility and choice** - Securing housing options outside Harrow and London will be necessary for those households for whom this offers the best solution, and if that is what they choose. A focus on increasing mobility is therefore essential. Given the small size of the social housing stock in Harrow it is essential that we make the most of this sector, and encouraging under-occupier moves and introducing fixed term tenancies are one way of encouraging those who are able to move on. However the latter will need to be considered carefully as these could be a barrier to under occupation moves especially when combined with higher rents;

Action	Progress
1. Introduce fixed term tenancies - Model impact and potential for increased voids against “churn” and impact on community sustainability - Determine measures to be adopted in policy to eliminate/reduce any adverse equality impacts.	Draft Tenancy Strategy out for consultation
2. Encourage underoccupation moves - Review options taking into account issues re increased rents and flexible tenancies as a barrier to encouraging mobility.	Considered in draft Tenancy Strategy
3. Promote low cost home ownership schemes - Review current options and especially what prevents take-up of current schemes by priority groups	Still to be progressed
4. Change allocation policies to reduce waiting time for those who will qualify for housing by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. giving more priority to working households,</li> <li>b. giving overcrowding priority only to those households with severe overcrowding and prioritise families with school age children</li> <li>c. limiting medical priority, so only households whose housing circumstances are having major adverse effects to one or more members of the household will receive priority</li> <li>d. giving priority to ex-service</li> </ol>	Details in Allocation Scheme proposals

**5. Supporting sustainable and viable communities** – Overall it is important that we preserve the sustainability and viability of Harrow’s social housing to avoid Council housing in particular becoming ghettos of welfare benefit dependency where there is little hope for people to improve their circumstances. Changing the allocation policy to provide a balance of employed and unemployed working households may contribute to this, alongside welfare to work programmes, financial inclusion strategies etc. The use of fixed term tenancies will need to be carefully introduced in order not to increase stock turnover to a point where communities are destabilised.

Action	Progress
1. Develop and promote employment, Basic Skills, and vocational schemes supporting social housing residents into sustainable employment.	Priority families living in social housing being identified for Reed partnership families programme.  Meeting held with Economic Development team to explore options
2. Support / implement financial inclusion strategies for low income households - Identify families most likely to be affected by the introduction of Universal Credit and changes to Council Tax benefit	Corporate working group identifying the most affected families in relation to introduction of Council tax localisation and other benefit changes

**6. Procuring supported housing for people with additional needs** - We need to make sure that there is supported housing available to meet the needs of older people, those with mental health needs, learning disabilities and looked after children. This needs to be consistent with the priorities of offering personalised services, promoting independence, reducing the use of residential care and producing revenue efficiencies wherever possible. This will include options appraisals/redesignation/ modernisation of existing supported housing schemes and investigating new private sector housing options. There are also implications for the housing allocations policy review to be considered. Any decision to proceed with a new supported housing scheme will be subject to approval of a robust business case.

Action	Progress
Develop plans for supported housing for people with lower level support needs, as part of a longer term prevention approach  - Adults & Housing working group to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop plans for best use of existing sheltered housing to ensure that it meets a graduated range of individual care and support needs (including being a suitable alternative to residential care) This will include use of hub and spoke model, modernisation of services/ schemes and</li> </ul>	Sheltered Housing Service review underway

<p>decommissioning of inappropriate/unsuitable schemes. It may also include services organised across client groups, where appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide clear message to Registered providers &amp; private developers on strategic commissioning priorities</li> <li>• Investigate additional housing options for looked after children who are close to moving into independent housing</li> <li>• Investigate private sector housing options for supported accommodation</li> </ul>	<p>Meeting with individual RPs to discuss their asset management strategies</p> <p>Increased quota for Council nominations to Looked After Children for 2012/13</p> <p>Still to be progressed</p>
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**7. Improving neighbourhoods and the quality of existing homes** - The Housing Business Plan outlines the impact of moving to a self financing model and the options there will be for continuing to maintain and improve the Council's housing stock and estates. Given the increase in the importance of the private rented sector as an option for people who are unable to buy and for those in priority housing need there is increasing importance on what the Council can do to both enable and enforce improved standards, including energy efficiency and CO2 reduction, whilst encouraging growth of the sector rather than stifling it. Where housing proposals require planning permission, the recently adopted planning guidance on residential development and the emerging development management policies (DPD Development Plan Document) will have a key part to play in meeting this objective.

Action	Progress
Refer to Housing Business Plan action plan	In development
Refer to Private Sector Housing Strategy	In development