

**Newcastle-under-Lyme
Borough Council
Housing Strategy
2016 - 2021
Draft for Consultation**

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Consultation

Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council has now produced a draft housing strategy for the period 2016 – 2021 and would now like to invite you to make comments.

The consultation runs for eight weeks from **Monday 4th January 2016** with a deadline for response by **Monday 29th February 2016**.

There are two ways to provide us with your comments about the contents of the draft Strategy;

Online: Visit www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/all-services/get-involved and complete the short survey

By email: housingmailbox@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk

Foreword

Welcome to the Newcastle-under-Lyme Housing Strategy for 2016 to 2021. The strategy has five key priorities which allows us to focus on what matters to our communities and supports the Councils vision and corporate priorities to:

- A clean safe and sustainable borough.
- A borough of opportunity.
- A healthy and active community.
- Becoming a co-operative council, delivering high quality community driven services.

Since the publication of our last Housing Strategy, there have been significant changes to the local and national political policy and funding landscape. This new Housing Strategy reflects these changes and is underpinned by relevant policies and strategies which will enable us achieve our priorities for housing within the Borough.

We have been extremely busy since the publication of the previous strategy. We have successfully worked with our partners to deliver over **200 affordable homes** since 2011 as well as brought over **193 empty homes** back into use over a period of two years. We have also increased opportunities for residents to find a home through Newcastle Housing Advice by empty providing access to over **2500 homes** for households from the Housing Register. We have also increased our relationships with private rented landlords and provided support for our most vulnerable residents

There is still a lot more work to do. We will continue to provide strategic direction, ensure we meet our objectives and monitor our services to verify they are responsive to local needs and are able to contribute to a sustainable and prosperous Borough.

We hope that you are able to consider this draft strategy and provide comments so that we can be confident that the final strategy fully addresses the needs of the Borough.

Councillor B Proctor: Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning

Introduction

Welcome to the draft Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council Housing Strategy for the period 2016-2021. The strategy seeks to support the Council to achieve its aims and objectives for housing within the Borough, working to improve the quality, choice, supply and access to housing for current and future residents.

In the process of achieving successful outcomes it is acknowledged that the strategy will have a key role to play in contributing to the continued economic regeneration and development of the Borough and to sustain the Borough's character and identity.

The quality of housing, its cost and location is of primary importance to ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate in their community. Moreover, housing has a significant role in people's quality of life; their wellbeing and health.

Since the publication of the last Housing Strategy which covered the period 2011-2016, there has been significant change to both the national and local approach towards housing policy and funding opportunities for building and improving homes.

To ensure we are prepared for the challenge ahead, it is essential that we work with our partner registered housing providers, developers, stakeholders and residents to embrace the opportunities which will support our priorities. We have therefore developed this draft Housing Strategy in consultation with them and identified five key priorities

- Priority 1 To support the delivery of affordable housing and development.**
- Priority 2 To provide help and advice for finding a home.**
- Priority 3 To reduce the number of empty homes.**
- Priority 4 To give support to the Private Sector.**
- Priority 5 To promote independence and inclusion to our most vulnerable residents.**

To achieve these, we will continue to work within the Council's core objectives to ensure investment is targeted to achieve maximum outcomes, and extend our enabling role to guide direct and influence developments and services by working with partners, local people and communities.

We have put in place a delivery plan for measuring progress and will use this to evaluate our outcomes and share this information with our residents and partners through a variety of communication mediums.

National and Local Policies

The structure of a housing strategy is shaped and influenced by national, regional and council policies, guidance and strategies.



Legislation and national policy

Housing and Health

Housing plays a major role in good health, with warm, dry homes, and access to green space boosting people's wellbeing. The provision of high quality affordable housing reduces health inequalities by preventing illness associated with damp and overcrowding.

Specialist housing and support allows older people and those living with long term conditions and other health issues to live independently. Joint working between housing and health authorities can reduce hospital admissions, speed up hospital discharge and reduce persistent health inequalities.

Health and Social Care Act 2012

The aim of the **Housing and Social Care Act 2012** is to modernise the health service by cutting back on unnecessary administration in the system and giving responsibility for commissioning to clinicians, giving providers the freedom to innovate and improve services and supporting local authorities to take on new roles to improve public health.

Housing has a lot to offer to health and care. Safe, healthy homes underpin good health and wellbeing. The home is also an important delivery channel for services that enable vulnerable and older people to access or stay in contact with a variety of services they need to maximise independence. The Act should bring new opportunities for housing and health providers to deliver better outcomes through more integrated services.

Care Act 2014

The **Care Act 2014** looks to ensure that the social care system is based on the principles of prevention, early intervention, and is focused on an individual's well-being and ability to maintain their independence. Housing is referenced throughout and included in the key definitions of wellbeing, prevention and integration.

Localism Act

The **Localism Act 2011** introduced a number of key reforms in relation to housing and planning with the primary objective of decentralising power to local areas. This provided the legislative framework to promote the delivery of the Government's policy priorities.

National Housing Strategy

Laying the Foundations a housing strategy for England

The Government's housing strategy, published in 2011, set out a clear agenda to boost the economy by stimulating the housing market and building new homes. The strategy sets out a range of measures including the change to funding of affordable housing, requirements in relation to design, quality and improved environmental standards of new and existing homes; making best use of existing stock (including empty homes) and the introduction of fixed term social housing tenancies.

The National Planning Policy Framework

In 2012, the Government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which aimed to reduce the amount of planning guidance and simplify the planning process. The NPPF signalled a shift in emphasis towards a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The NPPF requires councils' to identify the full, objectively assessed need for market and affordable homes in the housing market area and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. The NPPF makes it clear that it is Government policy that there should be a significant boost in the supply of housing.

The NPPF also sets a definition of affordable housing for planning purposes. This includes social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

Planning Policy for Traveller Sites came into force at the same time as the NPPF and requires the Council to set pitch targets for travellers and plot targets for travelling show people.

Planning and Housing Bill

The Housing and Planning Bill was presented in October 2015. The purpose of the Bill is to provide the legislative means for the creation of more affordable homes, increased home ownership and to improve the way housing is managed.

The Bill is made up of eight parts, the first five focus on:

- starter and custom/self-built homes;
- rogue landlords;
- recovering abandoned premises;
- reforming social housing; and
- other changes to simplify and improve legislation on housing and rents.

The main planning changes are included in part six of the Bill. The proposed planning reform focuses on seven key areas:

- neighbourhood planning;
- local planning;
- planning in Greater London;
- local registers of land and permission in principal;
- planning permission;
- nationally significant infrastructure projects; and
- urban development corporations.

Changes to the compulsory purchase regime are included in part seven of the Bill and are aimed at making compulsory purchase "clearer, fairer and faster".

The Bill will need to pass through the House of Commons, the House of Lords and receive Royal Assent before being enacted, a process which is expected to take 12 to 18 months. This strategy seeks to consider the likely changes required from this Bill.

Welfare Reform

The Government's commitment to reform the welfare system has significant implications for both tenants and landlords in the private and social housing sector. A range of benefit changes have been introduced over the last four years, to housing benefit regulations and through the Welfare Reform Act 2012. The Act provides for a radical overhaul of the benefit system through the introduction of Universal Credit, a single benefit for people of working age, which will replace existing benefits such as Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance and Housing Benefit.

A number of other changes have taken place since 2011 that affect local residents. This includes the introduction of Local Council Tax Support Service and new regulations on Housing Benefit. These restrict and reduce the level of funding many households are able to claim, such as lower rates of local housing allowance for private tenants, a cap on the level of benefit for families, and size criteria for the homes of social housing tenants.

Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council Corporate Strategies

Council Plan 2013 – 2016

Housing forms a key component of the four corporate priorities:

Priority 1: A clean, safe and sustainable borough.

Priority 2: A borough of opportunity.

Priority 3: A healthy and active community.

Priority 4: A co-operative Council, delivering high-value, community-driven services.

It also forms an important part of the Sustainable Community Strategies two priorities of supporting vulnerability and economic development.

Local Strategies

The Borough Council has three main strategies linked to delivering its priorities. These show how the council is planning to work with partners and other organisations to improve and develop local communities to deliver our vision for the Borough.

Economic Development Strategy 2012 - 2017

This strategy shows how the Council by working with the business community and local partners can improve the economic prospects of the area

The strategy has four themes:

- Business – strengthening the business base.
- Place and infrastructure – physical transformation.
- People – transforming ambition.
- Image and marketing – transforming perceptions.

Stronger and Safer Communities Strategy 2012 – 2017

This strategy aims to create a community centred on the Council's vision – a community that:-

- Is strong, resilient, supportive and encourages people to take responsibility for their own lives whilst supporting them through the difficult times.
- Is free from crime, disorder and danger.
- Lives, works and studies in areas which are organised, planned effectively and allow equal access to all services and facilities.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013 -2018

The vision of this strategy is to contribute to the improved health and wellbeing of our residents by supporting them to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

To deliver this vision we will:

1. Look at ways to reduce health inequalities.
2. Promote healthy lifestyles and healthy communities.
3. Collate local information on health and wellbeing issues and address them.
4. Work with partners to develop and implement an action plan to meet the vision.

Key Housing Issues

As a precursor to the draft strategy a Strategic Housing Review has been completed. The review can be found as an appendix. The information below summaries the key issues:

Demographics

During the period of the last census, 2010/11, the population of the Borough rose from 122,048 to 123,871. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of single person households to 16,263, which accounts for 30% of total households. This demographic change has also impacted upon the housing register, where the largest group seeking housing are single person households requiring one bedroom properties.

The population of the Borough is ageing and it is projected that in 2030, there will be a total of 12,202 households over the age of 65 who will be living alone within the Borough. This will have implications for housing within the Borough, as appropriate dwellings will have to be provided for older people both within the private and social sectors.

Conversely the Borough is home to Keele University and there are a significant number of students living within the Borough. The University has ambitions to increase the student population from 10,000 to 13,000 and the need for accommodation may be met through either additional purpose-built student accommodation or Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) in the private rented market.

Housing Stock

There are currently 54,790 dwellings in the Borough of which approximately 70% are owner-occupied, 11% private rented with 19% let by social landlords.

In the last five years there has been a marked increase in the level of private renting sector, which, whilst it averages 11%, is much higher in the former coalfield estates and the Town Ward.

In 2008 the Housing Stock Condition Survey reviewed the levels of stock condition in the Borough. The survey estimated that 8,209 private sector dwellings exhibited Category 1 hazards; these are not evenly distributed throughout the Borough and tend to be more prevalent in the following areas: Newcastle Town Centre, Thistleberry, Cross Heath, Knutton, Silverdale, May Bank, Porthill, Wolstanton and Butt Lane. Furthermore poor housing conditions are concentrated in the private rented sector

Local Economy

The level of unemployment in Newcastle increased dramatically following the economic downturn of 2008, with rates peaking at 4.1% in April 2009. However, in line with the trend across the country, the rate of people claiming Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) has gradually fallen. In June 2014 the rate of unemployment stood at 1.9%, lower than the national average of 2.4%.

Despite the falling unemployment rates overall, unemployment locally continues to disproportionately affect people aged 16-24. Currently this group accounts for around a quarter of JSA claimants in the Borough.

In 2013 the average gross annual income for residents in the Borough was £24,769 and the average gross household income around £34,600.

The housing market performs better than neighbouring Stoke-on-Trent but still falls below regional and national averages. The market is stronger in the rural areas in the south of the Borough.

Affordability has worsened since 1997 and is an issue for first time buyers and those who wish to live in rural communities.

The level of private rents within the Borough may present affordability issues for those households in receipt of Local Housing Allowance rates, as the level of rents paid by housing benefit is less than the average and in some cases the lower quartile private rents. Renting from a registered housing provider is a more affordable option.

In 2015, DECC reported that 14.3% of households in the Borough were in fuel poverty. However, there are particular wards within the Borough; Town, Butt Lane, Knutton and Silverdale which have a greater level of fuel poverty than the Borough average.

Homelessness

204 Homeless decisions were made during 2013-2014 of which 29 households were accepted as statutory homeless.

The majority of those accepted as homeless fall within the age group of 25 – 44 year olds. The number of homeless acceptances for 16 to 24 year olds increased in 2013 as did acceptances for those aged 45-59 years. Part of this increase may reflect the lack of opportunity to prevent homelessness through the provision of alternative accommodation for single people who may have been affected by welfare reforms.

More than half of the households accepted as homeless over the past four years are lone females either with or without children, there has also being an increase in the number of lone males with or without children.

The causes of homelessness in the Borough reflect the national picture of parental / relatives / friends no longer willing / able to accommodate and the loss of rented or tied accommodation (termination of assured tenancy). Domestic Violence is the main cause of homelessness with fewer of those accepted as homeless being so as a result of mortgage arrears or lost tenancies due to rent arrears.

Priority 1

To support the delivery of affordable housing and development

Within our Council Plan, we have said that ‘Housing will be available and accessible to meet a range of diverse needs.’ Building homes and specifically building affordable homes within the Borough will help to achieve this key priority for the Council.

We believe that a vibrant housing market in the Borough is important. This is a housing market where people want to live and then in turn, where developers want to build. New houses and affordable homes will meet the needs of the residents that live within the Borough and those that want to live here. This will also bring about economic growth – as housing construction, repairs and maintenance has a direct impact on economic output. There is also a very close relationship between job growth and housing as councils wanting to see job growth will need to ensure homes to accommodate the local workforce are made available.

Housing Development

The Council has commissioned a Strategic Housing Market Assessment. This provides an assessment of housing needs for the housing market area, including affordable housing with recommendations on house types, tenures and sizes. Once published, the evidence will be used in developing housing policies in the Local Plan, and these policies will play a key role in delivering the Council’s Housing Strategy. We have also been involved with the Local Enterprise Partnership for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire in commissioning a Housing Investment Strategy. This will enable councils in Staffordshire to set out a clear plan of action to help achieve appropriate housing development across Staffordshire.

Definition of Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is housing that is provided at below market prices to those people who are unable to afford to purchase or rent houses generally available on the open market without financial assistance, as their only home.

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out what affordable housing is in planning terms. It says that affordable housing is ‘social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market’.

Key evidence

- The Borough has seen the development of 1,362 homes over a period of five years.
- Many people particularly first time buyers are unable to buy and are left outside of the housing market. The greatest obstacle in buying a home is a high purchase price and the availability of a mortgage and deposit. This is an issue both nationally and within the Borough. The level of home ownership has fallen since 2001.
- The measure of house prices to earnings is used to assess affordability. Households will not be able to afford and buy on the open market when and where house prices to earnings are greater than a ratio of 3.5. In Newcastle the affordability ratios are 5.17 for lower quartile properties and 5.29 for average priced properties.

- The draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment has calculated that there is an annual need of at least 163 affordable homes every year within the Borough.
- Starter homes are suitable for dual income couples with no children as other household types are unlikely to be able to afford this option (Shelter, 2015).

Achievements include

Within the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance, which sets out the Council's position for affordable housing, we said that we would require 'affordable housing' on developments where 15 units or more units were being built in the urban areas and 5 or more units on developments within the rural areas. We said that we would want the affordable housing to be both social rented and shared ownership, which would be owned and managed by housing associations.

We have been committed to the development of affordable homes within the Borough and have achieved notable successes:

- 210 affordable homes have been built by Registered Social Landlords in the Borough over a period of 3 years from 2011-2014 (*Homes and Communities Statistics*). These have been social rented properties and shared ownership homes. The Council has supported the Registered Social Landlords in their development programmes.
- 144 affordable homes were secured by way of Section 106 Agreements; a mix of 2, 3 and 4 bedroom properties, to meet the diverse need of our residents.

The draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) is saying that there continues to be an identified need for affordable housing within the Borough. The draft SHMA has calculated that there is a continuous annual need of 163 affordable homes every year within the Borough.

The draft SHMA has identified that the private rented sector is playing a significant role in accommodating people who have a housing need. Although, this is not formally recognised as affordable housing, evidence shows that a significant number of people in social housing are moving to the private rented sector.

Future Influences

The Borough Council remains committed to affordable housing but recognises that the affordable housing landscape is changing.

The Government has announced that the 'right to acquire' will be extended on the same basis as right to buy tenants. It is anticipated that this will give tenants who have had tenancies for period of 5 years or more, the ability to purchase their rented properties at significant discounts to housing.

It has also been announced that there would be a reduction in social rents by 1% a year for four years. This will represent a very substantial reduction in associations' anticipated rental income.

Starter homes, which are homes built by private developers and sold at 80% of their market prices to first time buyers will become a major affordable housing building policy of the Government. It seems that starter homes may replace other forms of affordable housing.

Continuous service improvements

Housing Development

Housing development will remain a key objective to support the economic development of the Borough and to meet housing needs.

- As a planning authority we will agree upon an objectively assessed need for the Borough and to develop robust plans both for planning and housing to bring about appropriate development within the Borough. We will seek to investigate suitable housing sites for future consideration in the Joint Local Plan Site Allocations.
- As a strategic housing authority we recognise the benefits of working with partner organisations to deliver better development schemes and to meet a wider range of objectives. We recognise the significant opportunity available to work with Keele University and the County Council with the support of ATLAS (the specialist planning section of the HCA) to take forward a master plan for a Newcastle Western Urban Expansion at Keele. This will enable the Council to fully consider the opportunities to deliver a wide range of housing to meet both affordable housing needs, student accommodation and to provide quality housing to meet the expectations of higher earning households. The master planning will also seek to support the development of Keele University as a key educational and high value employment site.
- We will seek to ensure that housing is provided to meet and support economic development. The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Local Enterprise Partnership has signed a concordat with Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership to work together to support economic development. The Government's decision on HS2 investment will bring an emerging consensus that there is great potential for the area to derive significant economic benefit and that the Local Enterprises Partnerships and Local Authorities in the area should work together to optimise the economic benefits for all parties. A new growth focussed partnership is emerging to deliver plan-led sustainable growth with infrastructure to deliver connectivity being crucial. We will ensure that housing is effectively planned as the Northern Gateway Development Zone (NGDZ) develops.
- As a strategic housing authority we will work with Developers, the Council's Development Management Team and the Homes and Communities Agency to bring forward new development sites and consider the barriers to development to wherever possible seek to address issues to unlock sites to ensure development is brought forward.
- We will promote home ownership and support first time buyers to become property owners. We have encouraged home ownership within our Affordable Housing Policy

whereby a proportion of the affordable housing requirements are in the form of shared ownership for qualifying person, which includes first time buyers. These are units that allow people to part buy and part rent.

The Government has said that it will focus on home ownership for the first time buyers by encouraging the development of starter homes and by facilitating self-build and custom build. The Council will seek to compliment these policies and promote the supply of starter homes through the planning process.

Affordable Housing

Whilst starter homes provide access to home ownership for many young working couples, there is an affordability issue within the Borough where certain households with very low incomes are unable to realise their aspirations of owning a property nor renting decent accommodation from the private rented sector and these would require the greatest affordable accommodation, which is social rented and affordable rented.

The reduction in social tenancy rents, the extension to Right to Acquire and the changes to the Welfare Benefits will have a fundamental impact on all Registered Social Landlords, including those within the Borough.

The landscape for affordable housing development is likely to change and will present challenges for both the Council and the Registered Providers. It is therefore important that:

We will work in partnership to gain an understanding of the impacts of policy changes on the Registered Provider's business plans and to develop an understanding of their future direction.

- We will continue to meet with Registered Providers, to understand the likely impact of these changes and to develop appropriate plans for affordable housing, homelessness and allocations.

We will support the development of affordable housing

- We will continue to support Registered Providers with developing affordable homes within the Borough. We will do this by continuing to give strategic support by identifying housing need within the Borough, both by tenure and type, then where appropriate we will give extended support to providers through the HCA Affordable Housing Programme. We will also negotiate with developers at a planning stage to secure Section 106 contribution in the form of affordable homes on site or to secure off-site affordable housing contribution and using this as match funding for the development of affordable homes.
- Our Asset Management Strategy identifies where land within the Council's ownership which is considered to be surplus to operational needs may be considered for disposal for development. Where this is the case the Council seeks to generate a land receipt for the Council to fund the Council's Capital Strategy requirements to deliver corporate priorities. Going forward we will assess the suitability of land disposals for housing development on a case by case basis to ensure that maximum

benefit is secured for our residents. This will include an assessment as to if we will meet or exceed the affordable housing requirements.

We will work with the private rented sector to develop greater choice for households in housing need

- The private rented sector has grown significantly and will continue to be an important tenure. Although, the private rented sector is not suitable for all households needs it is appropriate and suitable for accommodating certain households.

Priority 2

To provide help and advice for finding a home

It is essential we ensure residents have access to advice on their individual housing needs and promote the ability for individuals and households to make informed choices for their own housing needs, whether it is ensuring access to affordable housing to purchase, access for intermediate housing or advice about renting in the social or private rented sector.

Key evidence

- In terms of the Housing Register, of the 1800 customers registered as at September 2015, 80% per cent of those registered are seeking 1-2 bedroom sized accommodation, while 20% per cent are seeking the more traditional 3 - 4 bedroom family size accommodation.
- In comparison, the availability of stock from the major registered housing provider Aspire highlights that the majority of the stock is the more traditional family size.
- Evidence indicates that the majority of housing need is within Kidsgrove and Talke wards (SHMA 2014).
- The most sought after type of property is a family size 2 bed house or 1 bedroom apartment, which is needed to form a new household, downsize or to assist with overcrowding.

Newcastle Housing Advice

Improvements to how customers can access housing advice and options.

The Housing Register is managed by **Newcastle Housing Advice**, as part of the homelessness and housing advice contract currently administered by Midland Heart. The contract has been in place since April 2014 and will be reviewed within the life time of this strategy. Customers access the Housing register on line through Homesdirect. Through partnership working Registered Providers and Private Landlords can advertise available properties to enable those registered with NHA to express an interest.

Homesdirect promotes the ability for individuals and households to make informed choices for their own housing needs and encourages customers to update and access their information when their circumstances change.

Achievements include

Since the launch of Homesdirect in 2014, we have focussed on:

- Promoting the service continually to raise awareness of Homesdirect.
- Completing a customer survey of the service to increase the number of customers accessing the service in the first 12 months of the service going live.

- Successfully working with housing register providers who have joined the system to improve the choice and quality of accommodation.
- Reviewing the nominations agreement with our housing providers to improve not only the quality of information but also to reduce the time between when a tenant moves from a property, it being advertised and then let.

“The results of the survey were very encouraging, highlighting satisfaction with the system and service and the helpful advice of the staff provided.” This is extremely pleasing considering that the majority of customers surveyed were still waiting to be housed’. Homesdirect customer satisfaction survey.

In response to our customers and housing providers needs we will continue to focus our attention on:

Promotion and improvements to the Homesdirect service. This will include clearer information to help customers access information and working with our partners to continuously monitor customer satisfaction by regular reviews and engagement with customers.

Monitoring the effectiveness of the Homesdirect system and supporting users by making it easier for customers to use the website and also for administrators of our partner registered housing providers. The website has recently undergone a revision to the functionality that will be available which includes:

For our housing register customer

- The homepage that customers see when they access the website has been improved to make it easier to use the site. The property search menu is user friendly for customers use. It is more comparable to commercial sites like rightmove.co.uk.
- There are additional sections on the website that can be configured to display news about new developments, or any other lettings related activity for customers to see.
- There is improved integration of recent let information and local services throughout the site which will give customers more information on local facilities and a better understanding of their possibility of obtaining a property in a specific area.

For our Registered housing providers

- There is a bulk messaging function which will allow staff to send messages to a group of customers for example mailshots to a group of customers requiring specific facilities.
- Pop up highlights of specific information on adverts where necessary for example to highlight that a property has particular facilities such as aids or adaptations. Adverts will be more detailed to give customers better information before placing a bid. Properties of alternative tenures can be advertised as a separate advert type
- The upgrade will be accessible via mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets so it will fit the screen of the relevant device.

- Appointments for viewings and sign ups can be managed on Homes Direct. A verification check of customers contact details before a bid is placed. This will ensure that correct contact details are known to arrange a viewing.

Continuous service improvements

We will work to continue to improve the effectiveness and performance of Newcastle Housing Advice

- To monitor and support the delivery of NHA in line with best practice and any emerging changes to legislation and policy.

We will work to continue to encourage more providers to participate with Homesdirect

- To focus on encouraging more providers to participate with Homesdirect, and include Registered Provider and Private Sector Landlords to further develop choice for our customers.

We will work to continue to monitor our processes for nominations to our Registered Housing Providers

- To monitor how we process nominations to our registered providers and stream line systems to ensure that they are fair, transparent and allow us the flexibility to change as and when required.

We will work to continue to encourage our customers to use self- help aids and digital resources

- To promote the ability for individuals and households to make informed choices for their own housing needs, by using social media, interactive web applications and ensure that all our customer access hubs have information and help available for our customers to access.

Priority 3

To reduce the number of empty homes

Empty homes represent waste, financial expense and missed opportunity. They blight communities, can attract anti-social behaviour and tie up the resources of the Council and the emergency services. Bringing empty homes back into use is a sustainable way to contribute to future housing demands and contributes positively to the whole community.

Empty homes figures are collated from Council tax records where they are classed as short term; under two years and long term; over two years. Where a property has been empty for over two years council tax is charged at 150%. Empty homes brought back into use attract new homes bonus income providing an additional incentive for this work.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of empty properties within the Borough, where properties empty for more than 6 have fallen from 757 in the year 2013 to 564 in the year 2015. Evidence from the DCLG suggests that the vacancy rate in 2013 both regionally and the national level was 2.7%. On this comparative basis, the vacancy rate for the Borough is not considered to be problematic, as the housing market, at any given period of time, will always have a number of empty properties, as this is indicative of turnover of properties and its dynamics. However, analysis of the vacancy rate shows that particular wards within the Borough do have a higher rate of empty properties and it is these wards and that will need to be addressed in terms of policy actions, particularly if there are a higher number of properties within particular localities.

Key evidence

- The Housing Review breaks down empty properties by Ward and shows it is a matter affecting all areas both rural and urban, with Town and Loggerheads and Whitmore both having relatively high numbers (Strategic Housing Review - Appendix 1).
- Approximately 10% of the properties have been empty for many years often for complex reasons. These properties are the most challenging both in resources and time but have a significant impact on their communities when brought back into use.

Achievements include

- A significant decrease in empty properties which have fallen by 26% over a period of two years
- Working with Registered Providers to access Homes and Communities Agency funding to buy and renovate empty homes.
- Working with accredited landlords to bring empty town centre buildings into use as accommodation.
- Prompted owners to invest at least £63,000 in empty homes in the last two years through match funded grants.

Continuous Service Improvements

The Council approved an Empty Homes Strategy in 2013 and an update to it in 2014 outlining our intended use of enforced sale where appropriate.

We will continue to work on the following key areas which will support:

- The longer term empty and problematic properties,
- Encouraging reuse through information, support and incentives,
- Offering match funded grant aid,
- Using enforcement action as appropriate to reduce adverse impacts on neighbouring properties and where appropriate to force a change in ownership,
- Engaging with partners to help owners wishing to sell their properties,
- Setting annual targets for return to use including a separate target for long term empty properties monitored and reported through the annual service plan.

Priority 4

To give support to Private Sector Housing

This priority focusses on the existing private sector properties both in terms of private renting and owner occupation. Increasingly the supply of good quality and well managed property within this sector will become increasingly important to meeting housing need.

The role of the private rented sector is set to increase in meeting the aims of the homeless strategy it is therefore important we provide support to the sector to ensure homes are maintained free from hazards and are well managed by knowledgeable landlords. In the last five years there has been a marked increase in the level of private renting sector, which whilst it averages 11% is much higher in the former coalfield estates and the Town ward.

The 2008 Housing Stock Condition Survey reviewed the levels of stock condition in the Borough. The survey estimated that 8,209 private sector dwellings exhibited Category 1 hazards and were not evenly distributed throughout the Borough and were more prevalent in certain areas, with the poorest of housing conditions being concentrated in the private rented sector.

We are at present, commissioning an updated Housing Stock Condition Survey. This will be complete and published by mid-2016.

Key evidence

- There has been a 103% growth in private renting since the 2001 census, with 11% of housing in the borough privately rented. Certain areas of the borough have significantly high levels rising to over 40%. The evidence supports the important role it has for housing provision as an alternative option to home ownership or social renting.
- There are approximately 45 three storey licenced HMOs, 61 three storey HMOs that do not need a licence and 400 two storey HMOs. We are seeing a growing trend of new three storey estate properties, above shop conversions and new purpose built developments being used as HMOs.
- The Housing Review shows that the around 21% of owner occupied housing contains a serious hazard to health.
- Keele University has plans to increase its student population and changes to Staffordshire University which will influence the private rented market.

Achievements include

Since 2013 we have focussed on;

- removing 264 serious hazards to health from properties in the Borough,
- inspecting 195 houses in multiple occupation,

- increasing membership of the landlord accreditation scheme to 193 members with houses in the borough,
- promoting landlords to invest at least £62,335 in improvements to their properties,
- investing £87,545 in the homes of owner occupiers improving energy efficiency, removing hazards to health and dealing with emergency repairs.

Continuous Service Improvements

We will continue to develop our understanding of problematic areas to focus on,

- Estate action such as our work within Kidsgrove to present evidence on housing conditions, housing need, antisocial behaviour and crime in order to develop estate based interventions which may include selective licensing. The outcome of this pilot review in Kidsgrove will influence our approach in other areas.

We will continue to respond to complaints from tenants for;

- Housing inspections and undertake pro-active inspections in areas of identified need. Through our housing inspections we will provide advice to tenants and landlords then where appropriate will serve notices on landlords to rectify any safety defects. Key to all our action will be ensuring that tenants have a safe home to live in. We will develop links with health colleagues so that interventions can be based on health intelligence.

We will maintain our proactive inspection programme for Houses in Multiple Occupations (HMOs)

- To ensure HMOs have adequate fire precautions, are well managed, safe and hazard free.

We will work to develop of knowledge of;

- Houses converted to flats properties to include them in proactive inspection programmes.

We will continue to improve the physical and management standards using the;

- Landlord accreditation scheme for the private rented sector by providing encouragement, support and incentives to landlords through the accreditation scheme.

We will continue to work with higher education establishments to ensure;

- Student accommodation is of good quality, well managed, safe accommodation. Keele University has ambitions to increase student numbers and to provide more modern en-suite facilities. In the short term this may mean a reduction in available units on campus as property is retrofitted to provide en-suites. There are, however, a number of new development proposals in the town centre which incorporate student accommodation and may change student choices and the role of traditional shared student houses. We will monitor developments and continue to work with landlords and the universities regarding the provision of accommodation.

We are at presently commissioning an update to the Stock Condition Survey;

- Results should be known by mid-2016 and will guide future proactive interventions; support estates based initiatives and assess the impacts of activities over the last five years.

We will continue to target financial support to low income and vulnerable owners of all ages to help them maintain a healthy, safe home;

- Whilst it is the primary responsibility of the home owner to maintain the home intervention in tackling disrepair is a key to preventing ill health. In emergency situations we are able to assist with small scale repairs to ensure the home owner's life is not endangered. We are also able to provide a new loan service helping residents not eligible for grants to be able to invest in their home to protect their health. As the loan scheme funds are repaid the money can be reinvested to allow more loans to be issued to more vulnerable households over the years to come.

Priority 5

To promote independence and inclusion to our most vulnerable residents

The importance of housing to people's wellbeing and quality of life is a principal priority for us. As we work towards improving people's opportunities to access the right housing for their own personal circumstances, so too should we work towards developing a strategic link to the wellbeing of the person, an essential contribute to the health of the individual and household.

Staffordshire Health and Wellbeing Board 5 year strategy 'Living Well' directly links with our priority for promoting independence and inclusion and more closely aligns within the three key areas of statutory homelessness, Ageing Well and tackling Fuel Poverty.

Key evidence

Homelessness decisions and acceptances

- 204 Homeless decisions were made during 2013 - 2014, of which 29 households were accepted as statutory homeless (Source P1E Homelessness data).
- Households and individuals contacting Newcastle Housing Advice during 2013-2014 increased significantly in line with the national trend.

Statutory Homelessness - Providing housing advice and support

Through Newcastle Housing Advice we will ensure everyone will have access to advice about their individual housing options, particularly those struggling with housing costs or facing homelessness.

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, we have a statutory duty to review and refresh our Homelessness Strategy every five years.

We continue to have homelessness prevention as the starting point for our Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2020. Our fourth Homelessness Strategy, focuses on increasing the access and measures we have in place to prevent homelessness, whilst addressing new issues that arose during the period of our previous strategy. There is a detailed action plan, which identifies the ways in which we will work with our partners to prevent homelessness.

Our overall vision for our strategy is;

'To ensure that homeless levels in the Borough remain as low as possible through prevention and to provide in partnership effective and quality services to those affected by homelessness'.

From this vision stems our three key priority areas;

- Prevention
- Supporting households into sustainable housing solutions
- Working in partnership to address the causes of homelessness in Newcastle

Our key priorities are based upon the findings of our Homelessness review, consultation responses and consideration for the Government's Gold Standard benchmark programme.

Achievements include

- Shropshire, Staffordshire and Telford and Wrekin Homelessness Prevention Partnership (SSHPP). The partnership was formed in response to a single one off funding allocation from the DCLG. The partnership has supported the funding of our extremely successful shared accommodation pilot for single people under 35.
- SSHPP and Children's Services at the County Council have developed an effective process for jointly assessing the housing and support needs of 16 & 17 year olds to ensure that they receive prompt assistance to remedy their homelessness issues. At the time of writing the protocol is going through its final stages of adoption at the County Council. The protocol will provide a more co-ordinated approach to enable homelessness to be prevented and for suitable accommodation and support to be made available.

Newcastle Partnership Commissioning

In an attempt to deal with the ongoing reductions in funding, the Council recognises that more can be achieved collectively by partnership working than individually. Therefore work has taken place to develop the commissioning role within the Newcastle Partnership. In 2015 the partnership took over the role of commissioning services which were previously delivered by the Council's third sector commissioning process.

There are currently three homelessness prevention services that are commissioned via the Newcastle Partnership. These services enrich the main NHA service by providing bespoke homelessness assistance and prevention services for specific client groups. The services support the homelessness strategy delivery for preventing homelessness and are reviewed within the strategy action plan.

Voluntary Organisation Homelessness Grants

Any grants provided by the Council to voluntary organisations that are for a value less than £5000, are administered through the Council's Grant's Assessment Panel. The Panel considers the applications in line with the Council's priorities. Through this process, the Council currently funds three services which contribute to homelessness prevention.

Continuous service improvements

We will continue to review and monitor the progress of the action plan that has been developed within the fourth Homelessness Strategy and;

- We will build on the developed efficient and effective services that meet the needs of those affected by homeless from our previous homelessness strategies'.
- Support where resources allow the continuation of homelessness prevention services which are commissioned within the, SSHPP, Newcastle Partnership Commissioning and any smaller grant contributions that are made available through the Council and voluntary organisations.

Ageing well - Older Vulnerable People

Key evidence

- By 2030 the number of people 65 plus is projected to grow significantly
- 12,202 households will be single people age 65
- 20.8% (25,800 people) will have a limiting long term illness (LLTI)

The population of Newcastle under Lyme is 125,000 (2015) and by 2030 is estimated to grow to approximately 130,000 a 5 % increase at approximately 1.5 % per year. The population profile over people aged 65 and over will increase the highest, with the proportion of people aged 65 and over to grow to 25% from the total population.

As an indicator of health the Limiting long term Illness measure is a self-reported measure of someone's health, asking if a person has any long term illness, health problem or disability which limits work or daily activities. The 2011 census found that 20.8% (25,800 people) had a limiting long term illness (LLTI) in the Borough. This is higher than the England average of 17.6% (2011 census).

Increased life expectancy makes it important we continue to respond to the changing needs of our older population and specific population groups through new developments, refurbishment works to existing homes and improved access to and range of housing options.

Informing our strategic priorities in accordance with our core evidence base has been essential as we continually seek to adjust to a differing housing need for the Borough. For example, this has been achieved by working with providers who develop innovative projects which redesign existing provision of stock that meets today's needs and expectation for appropriate housing.

Achievements include:

- Completed 331 Disabled Facility Grants over the last three years with £1,996,069 invested in the homes of disabled residents to make their homes accessible and enable them to live independently the home of their choice.
- Completed 475 adaptations between 2011 and 2015 providing direct support to keep people safe in their own home and facilitate the care from hospital from home.
- Continued with the provision of the Revival Home Improvement agency service for older disabled and vulnerable persons, guiding them through the often complex and worrying process of carrying out repairs and adaptations to their home.
- The Council in partnership with Staffordshire County Council has enabled the development of two extra care schemes within the Borough; Millrise Extra Care Scheme and the Madeley Extra Care Scheme.

Continuous service improvements

We want residents to have the choice to remain in their own home and where practicable;

- We will work towards promoting such independence through our Disabled Facilities Grants, closely working with the occupational therapy service to identify necessary and appropriate adaptations and with Revival our Home Improvement Agency to deliver them as quickly as possible.

We will continue to use Revival's innovative outcome star assessment process to consider a wide range of help and options available including.

- Supporting and advising on the wider range of housing options available through Newcastle Housing Advice.

We will encourage and support new development and remodelling of existing housing stock

- To meet the needs of our older persons by working in partnership with our registered providers, developers and private sector landlords. A further extra care scheme is planned within Maybank; The Homestead, which will provide a further 65 units of specialist accommodation.

Tackling Fuel Poverty

Fuel poverty affects our most vulnerable residents and can have an adverse effect on their health. A household is considered to be in fuel poverty if they have required fuel costs that are above average and were they to spend this amount that they are left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

The key drivers behind fuel poverty are:

- The energy efficiency of the property (and therefore, the energy required to heat and power the home).
- The cost of energy.
- Household income.

Key evidence

- In 2015 according to Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) statistics, 14.3% of households within the Borough were in fuel poverty. This is lower than the West Midlands average of 15%.
- There are areas within the Borough that have significant levels of fuel poverty, above the average rate of 14.3% within the Borough.
- The wards where the highest proportion of households who are fuel poor live include, Butt Lane, Town and Knutton / Silverdale.

Achievements include

- Supported the North Staffordshire Warm Zone which delivered over 8,000 energy efficiency measures and secured £600,000 in new benefits income to low income households in the Borough.

- Secured funding from the Government Fuel Poverty Fund towards insulation and heating measures to 30 households
- Secured Warm Homes Healthy People funding to help approximately 200 vulnerable households keep warm in the winter.
- Targeted Emergency Repair Grants to low income householders to repair or where necessary replace heating systems at short notice.
- Provided funding to meet a shortfall in funding not met from energy company obligation payments to replace boilers and heating systems into the homes of low income households.
- Promoted to residents, a collective energy switching scheme to reduce energy costs

Continuous service improvements

We will adopt the first stage government target and will ensure that as many fuel poor homes in the Borough as is reasonable practicable achieve a minimum energy efficiency rating of band E by 2020 but will also encourage owners to install measures beyond this minimum. We will achieve this by:

- Working with our partners to seek opportunities for funding from the Government, energy companies and Health Sector.
- Introducing a loan scheme to help low income households finance more extensive, costly energy efficiency measures.
- Continuing to make funds available for Emergency Repair Grants targeted at low income households to replace heating at short notice.
- Using Energy Performance Certificate data to inform us in targeting area based action and find energy inefficient homes likely to be occupied by the fuel poor
- Improving standards in the private rented sector by:
 1. Enforcing the Housing and Health Rating System contained within the Housing Act 2004
 2. Providing advice to landlords to improve beyond the requirement to meet the minimum rating of Band E by 2020
- Encouraging standards above the minimum through the North Staffordshire Landlord Accreditation Scheme which is endorsed by the Council.

Housing Strategy Delivery Plan 2016-2021

The actions contained within the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan will be refreshed as part of the annual service plan with quarterly monitoring through the housing service team meetings and reporting to the Portfolio Holder.

Our Priority 1	How we will achieve	Who will help us achieve	Outcome/Target	When by
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
<p>To support the delivery of Affordable Housing and development</p> <p>To facilitate the provision of good quality homes to meet residents needs</p>	<p>Work with our RP's to support the development of affordable homes of all tenures to regenerate and to meet identified need</p> <p>To assist Planning Policy to develop a local plan based upon the needs identified (SHMA) and to consider updated affordable housing guidance to reflect national and local issues.</p>	<p>Registered providers</p> <p>NHA</p> <p>Strategic intelligence</p> <p>Homes and community agency</p> <p>Registered Housing Provider</p> <p>Private House Developers</p> <p>Spatial planning policy</p> <p>Elected members</p> <p>Residents</p>	<p>% of affordable housing as planning policy</p> <p>Annual and quarterly monitoring report of;</p> <p>a) Affordable housing delivery</p> <p>b) Mix and size of homes and provision for rural housing</p> <p>c)s106</p> <p>Monitoring of take-up of homeownership products/ intermediate housing</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout duration of strategy</p>

Our Priority 2	How we will achieve	Who will help us achieve	Outcomes/Target	When by
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
<p>To provide help and advice for finding a home</p> <p>To meet housing needs and develop housing choice for Newcastle Residents</p>	<p>Monitor and support the delivery of the NHA service</p> <p>Review nominations agreement with Registered Providers</p> <p>Continue to promote Homes Direct including, promotion of self help aids and resources</p> <p>Promote and encourage Private Sector Landlords to participate with Homesdirect to increase access to housing for those on the housing register</p>	<p>Newcastle Housing Advice</p> <p>Strategic Housing</p> <p>Private Sector Housing</p> <p>Registered providers</p> <p>Private sector landlords</p> <p>Elected members</p> <p>Residents</p>	<p>Annual and quarterly agreed monitoring of annual service delivery plan</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout duration of strategy</p>

Our priority 3	How we will achieve	Who will help us achieve	Outcomes/Target	When by
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
<p>To reduce the number of Empty Homes</p> <p>To contribute to the prosperity and sustainability of Newcastle</p>	<p>To implement the priorities within the empty homes strategy, focusing on;</p> <p>Problematic properties which are impacting on the local community,</p> <p>Identifying / unlocking barriers preventing return to use, including working on a Council wide basis</p> <p>Encouraging re use through support/incentives to owners to invest in their properties through match funding.</p>	<p>Private sector housing</p> <p>Strategic housing</p> <p>Revenues and benefits</p> <p>Police</p> <p>Registered Providers</p> <p>Legal services</p> <p>Residents</p>	<p>Annual and quarterly agreed monitoring of annual service delivery plan</p>	<p>Year on year reduction in empty homes ongoing for duration of strategy</p>

Our priority 4	How we will achieve	Who will help us achieve	Outcomes/Target	When by
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
<p>To give Support to the private sector</p> <p>To support a sustainable private landlord sector</p>	<p>Utilise the results of the stock condition survey to target action at priority issues.</p> <p>Increase membership of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme to recognise, support and promote good knowledgeable landlords.</p> <p>To develop a proposal for selective licensing in Kidsgrove and to take this forward to consultation.</p> <p>Proactive inspections of HMOs which are high risk for fire safety, hazards to health and</p>	<p>Private sector housing</p> <p>Strategic housing</p> <p>Revenues and benefits</p> <p>Police</p> <p>Registered Providers</p> <p>Legal services</p> <p>Residents</p> <p>Private sector tenants</p> <p>Landlord accreditation scheme</p>	<p>Annual and quarterly agreed monitoring of annual service delivery plan</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout duration of strategy</p>

	<p>management practices</p> <p>Promote owner occupiers incentives to those on low incomes to help maintain safe homes</p> <p>Maintain our understanding of our student accommodation including new town centre developments to ensure access to safe and well managed accommodation.</p>			
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Our priority 5	How we will achieve	Who will help us achieve	Outcomes/Target	When by
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
<p>To Promote independence and Inclusion to our most vulnerable residents</p> <p>To support vulnerable people and</p>	<p>Maximise the effectiveness of priorities identified in the fourth homelessness</p>	<p>Newcastle Housing Advice</p> <p>Strategic Housing</p>	<p>Annual and quarterly agreed monitoring of annual service delivery plan</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout duration of strategy and homelessness strategy</p>

<p>prevent homelessness in Newcastle</p>	<p>strategy</p> <p>Progress all eligible Disabled Facility Grants referrals in partnership with Revival HIA</p> <p>Develop appropriate partnerships for fuel poor homes to achieve minimum energy efficiency Band E by 2020</p> <p>Promote Revival's housing options service to enable older people to make informed housing choices</p> <p>Supporting remodelling of existing housing stock and conversions to meet emerging housing needs for older people</p>	<p>Private Sector Housing</p> <p>Registered providers</p> <p>Private sector landlords</p> <p>Elected members</p> <p>Residents</p> <p>Third sector and voluntary organisations</p> <p>Revival Home improvement agency</p> <p>Other government agencies and commissioned services</p>		
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