

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**ASSET MANAGEMENT, CULTURE AND
HOUSING CABINET MEMBER**

DELIVERING THE HOUSING STRATEGY

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To report on the progress in delivering North Lincolnshire's Housing Strategy.
- 1.2 To outline the key achievements and outcomes of the strategy to date.
- 1.3 Achievements include:
 - 136 new affordable homes built
 - Place of Change for homeless people opened
 - On line housing advice service launched
 - Fuel switching scheme launched
 - £221,000 external funding for Energy Efficiency

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1. The North Lincolnshire Housing Strategy 2013–18 was approved in December 2012. Action plans to help with delivery and monitoring were completed by April 2013.
- 2.2. Part of the strategy is to monitor the state of the housing market, housing needs and stock condition to comply with the Housing Acts.
- 2.3. The outcomes below follow the main strategy themes. We monitor chapters and action plans separately so there is some overlap. The outcomes are delivered by a number of service areas within the council and by our partners;

Meeting Housing Need

- 2.4. The number of new homes built in North Lincolnshire rose to 379 last year, a 16% increase on the previous year.
- 2.5. Working with a number of housing associations the council has helped to provide 136 new affordable homes. This is the second highest number of affordable homes created in a year since North Lincolnshire Council started in 1996. The

council and the Homes and Communities Agency helped to pay for 97 of them. Planning agreements (s106) gave 24 more affordable homes.

- 2.6. We have worked with Housing Associations to prepare a forward plan of housing schemes for future development. This was ready for the HCA bidding timetable and will be there for other funding opportunities.
- 2.7. Work on the affordable housing development plan document (DPD) has started. Planners use the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) model viability assessments when making planning decisions.
- 2.8. North Lincolnshire Homes is building new homes for people with a learning disability; this follows a successful funding bid, and the granting of planning permission.
- 2.9. North Lincolnshire Homes successfully secured funds to bring fifteen empty properties back into use. We have worked with them to identify the properties.
- 2.10. We have worked with NACRO to bring seven empty properties back into use for ex-offenders or those at risk of offending. We are also helping NACRO to find more funding to progress this work further.
- 2.11. We are working in partnership to bring an extra care scheme to the North Lincolnshire area. The scheme will be for people with physical disabilities or a learning disability.
- 2.12. A change to the Home Choice Lincs (HCL) allocations policy is helping those people affected by welfare reforms. Applicants whose housing benefit has been reduced due to having spare bedrooms, or who have had their benefits capped are given priority to move to somewhere more affordable. The council has also provided funds to improve access to debt counselling. The financial inclusion group has designed and delivered Money advice sessions called 'Quids In'.
- 2.13. The council has approved changes to the HCL allocation policy during the year. These were to make the policy more responsive to local needs and those of armed forces veterans.
- 2.14. We no longer needed the mortgage deposit support scheme that we had planned as the government introduced the Help to Buy Scheme. The scheme has helped at least 77 families to purchase their own home in North Lincolnshire.
- 2.15. The housing market in North Lincolnshire has moved over the last 12 months. The average house price is now £101,950, up by 5.7%. This is higher than the regional increase, but lower than the England and Wales increase of 6.7%, where the average house price is now £172,069.
- 2.16. Repossessions in Yorkshire and the Humber are down by 34%. Taken with the increase in house sales this indicates the start of a return towards a healthy housing market.

- 2.17. The Housing and Employment Land Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) has recently been out for consultation. This plan aims to ensure an adequate supply of land for housing development.
- 2.18. Following public consultation on the Lincs Lakes Area Action Plan, a 'submission draft' is being prepared for public consultation in the near future.
- 2.19. Guinness Northern Counties obtained planning permission and have started on site in the Advance Crosby area (West Street, Scunthorpe).
- 2.20. A Westcliff Regeneration project was formed by the council in partnership with North Lincolnshire Homes. A tender process for the development plan has also been started.

Improving Housing Conditions

- 2.21. When the Council replaced its main web site, we improved our information and advice for both Private Landlords and Tenants.
- 2.22. The Operational Housing Service deals with health and safety risks in the home. The estimated health cost savings from such actions made an estimated saving to the health service and the community of £610,831.
- 2.23. Our housing stock condition information is now out of date. Update information is very important to help inform future strategy and for bidding purposes. We will be undertaking a piece of work to update our intelligence on Housing Stock in 2014/15.
- 2.24. The updated Home Assistance Policy now includes the green deal.

Homelessness

- 2.25. In our bid to prevent debt and homelessness through money advice we delivered our 'Quids in' training sessions to 35 people last year. Work needs to continue as part of the preparations for universal credit to get more people to have their own bank accounts.
- 2.26. Housing Associations now make a rent affordability check as part of their housing allocations process. Forty-Nine people under the age of 35 were refused a housing offer last year because they could not afford the rent.
- 2.27. The council introduced new schemes on time at the beginning of last year for Crisis Loans; Community care grants; discretionary housing benefit; and a new council tax benefit scheme.
- 2.28. Housing Association tenants received advance information of the welfare reform changes. This was to help them to either find work; look to move to a smaller property; or to apply for discretionary housing payment to help prevent them falling into rent arrears. Despite the considerable work put in by North Lincolnshire Homes and others, rent arrears and rent recovery action has grown substantially.

- 2.29. The Home Choice Lincs Band 1* priority was introduced to help people to down size their home due to the new under occupation rules for housing benefit. In 2012/13, 52 households got this priority and 84 in 2013/14. Eighty households in Band 1* have now been re-housed. Rehousing ensures they can afford their rent, do not fall into arrears; and that their under occupied property can be used by another household that needs that size of home.
- 2.30. We launched our on line Housing Options Service; this enables people threatened with homelessness to access housing advice without having to contact the Housing Advice Team. So far, 388 people have used this; however, we need to increase awareness of this service via our own web site and the Home Choice Lincs site.
- 2.31. Scotter House, a Place of Change for homeless people, opened in February. This provides accommodation and an intensive housing related support service. The aim of the service is to reduce repeat homelessness and help people overcome their housing problems. The council helped fund the building and procured the housing related support service.

Increasing Independent living

- 2.32. A review of Care Homes has been carried out which will help us to understand the local market for this type of accommodation. In the future, our 'Better Care Funding' allocation from the government will need us to reduce the number of people entering residential care.
- 2.33. The promotion of telecare and telehealthcare to help people to remain in their own homes for longer will become more important in the future. There are approximately 90 users of telehealthcare in the authority now.
- 2.34. We have contributed to the Autism commissioning and implementation plan, and to the work of the Dementia steering group. The launch of the Dementia Action Alliance and the local directory of dementia services took place last month. Plans to roll out Dementia Friends and Dementia Champion training to front line and other staff will help establish Dementia friendly communities.
- 2.35. We monitor the housing needs of veterans through the local veterans group and through Home Choice Lincs. In total there are 24 veterans registered with Home Choice Lincs for housing from both North and North East Lincolnshire. Two veteran households were housed in each authority area last year.
- 2.36. Gypsy and Traveller housing needs were reviewed last year and will continue to be monitored on an annual basis.
- 2.37. Housing providers are working with the families' initiative, to help people to turn their lives around and help them to keep their homes.
- 2.38. Work continues to try to reduce the time taken to deliver disabled facilities grants in North Lincolnshire. Demand for the service continues to increase.
- 2.39. The council brought the First Stop service back in house last year. This service refers people to accommodation based supported housing and to floating housing

related support. Officers within the People and Places services and service users have reviewed a number of major contracts. Tendering exercises were completed to choose the best service providers, giving value for money and the best outcomes for local people.

- 2.40. The Young Peoples accommodation support service got funding in 2012 from the Social Enterprise Investment Fund (SEIF). This was to assess whether a staff led social enterprise company could deliver the service. With council support, PHASE (Young people's support) CIC was set up at the beginning of this year to deliver the service. PHASE is a Community Interest Company; as such, any surplus that is made is reinvested in the company to benefit young people.
- 2.41. PHASE now leases and manages The Pasture young parents' scheme. We will be transferring other Youth build schemes to the service in the coming months. This will ensure that the original letting criteria can be maintained, and the properties remain exempt from the single room rate or bedroom tax and mean that higher levels of management and support can be provided.
- 2.42. With the support of the council PHASE has submitted a bid to the Fair Chance Fund. The use of this fund is to improve outcomes for young homeless people whose needs are difficult to address using existing services. If the young person's needs are not addressed, they are likely to lead to long-term benefit dependency, health problems and increased crime.
- 2.43. Since April 1st 2014, PHASE has prevented four young people from having to present as homeless. PHASE has provided accommodation and support to the young people who are now achieving positive outcomes.

Learning Disability

- 2.44. The main success here has been in assisting North Lincolnshire Homes to attract external funding to build eight new homes on Haig Avenue in Scunthorpe. This will help to bring people with complex health or care needs back into the area. These are due for completion in October 2014.
- 2.45. An empty home has also been brought back into use for one short-term assessment flat and one shared fixed term (two people) flat, again in partnership with North Lincolnshire Homes.
- 2.46. The proportion of adults with learning disabilities who live in their own home or with their family is now 73.7%, a slight increase on the 2012/13 figure of 73.5%.
- 2.47. We have been working with one local provider to relocate and build an extra care scheme for people with a learning disability, or for those with physical disabilities.
- 2.48. All service users should have their housing needs discussed at their service reviews and the outcome of this should inform future housing provision plans.
- 2.49. During the last year, we have worked with others to produce a 'Complex Care Market position statement', which includes housing provision.

- 2.50. The housing related support service that supports many people with lower level housing related support needs is currently being evaluated.
- 2.51. People with a learning disability have managed to successfully bid for homes via the Home Choice Lincs lettings system, however, both the Home Choice Lincs and Care First computer systems cannot easily give monitoring information, we will work to improve this.

Affordable Warmth and Reduction in Carbon Emissions

- 2.52. An initial tender exercise was completed to allow the installation of affordable warmth measures and heating repairs. We are now evaluating a larger tender document for a framework of potential suppliers and funders to work with both North and North East Lincolnshire Councils to deliver 'Green Deal' measures. This has become more urgent given the government's decision to reduce the funding required from energy providers so that they could reduce household fuel bills.
- 2.53. Energy company obligation projects (ECO) have stalled due to national uncertainty over funding. This year 122 properties have received Eco Funding; Energy advice has been given to 63; four have accessed Green Deal funding; seven Energy Audits have been completed and one Hot Spot referral. Work started on ten properties in Dragonby, and phase two is now underway. Twelve properties have received measures in Ashby under the Carbon Saving Obligation (CSO) scheme, and another 11 started in April. In total, we spent £425,000 on energy efficiency measures last year with £221,000 of that being match funding from the energy company obligation part of the green deal.
- 2.54. Council members received training on Energy Efficiency.
- 2.55. We have trained front line staff in fuel poverty.
- 2.56. A fuel switching campaign has resulted in 99 households accessing cheaper energy via an alternative supplier.
- 2.57. The Home Assistance policy has been updated following consultation and to incorporate the Green Deal.
- 2.58. Winter warmth packs were distributed to households via the Stroke Association and Children's centres and were targeted to those affected by flooding.
- 2.59. The Councils poverty strategy now includes fuel poverty details.
- 2.60. Officers have been working on an oil bulk buying partnership with the Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council (HWRCC) to help those particularly in areas without access to gas.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1. There are no options for consideration with this report.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1. Not applicable.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1. Not applicable

6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

6.1. Not applicable

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

7.1. Not applicable

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1. The Cabinet Member notes the progress and successes outlined in this report.

8.2. That Cabinet Member congratulates the staff for their efforts in the progressing the Housing Strategy.

DIRECTOR OF PLACES

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report

North Lincolnshire Housing Strategy 2013 – 18
Housing Strategy Action Plans; Meeting Housing Need, Improving Housing Conditions, Homelessness, Increasing Independent Living, Learning Disability, Affordable Warmth and reduction in Carbon Emissions