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Glossary

Affordable Housing	Housing at a price below private market prices, which includes social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing.
Affordable Rented	Housing let by Registered Providers of social housing at a rent of no more than 80% of the local market rent.
Assured Tenancy	Introduced by the Housing Act 1988, assured tenancies are a form of residential tenancy that give a degree of security so that the tenant cannot be evicted without a reason. At the time of writing, they are the main form of tenancy used by Registered Providers of social housing.
Assured Shorthold Tenancy	Assured Shorthold Tenancies are the most common form of tenancy offered by private landlords. The tenancy is granted for a fixed period of time (usually 6 months) following which the tenancy usually converts to a Periodic tenancy which is automatically renewed every 2 months. The landlord can terminate the tenancy at any point by issuing a section 21 notice, which effectively gives the tenant two months notice to leave, however a court will not enforce the notice unless at least six months have elapsed from when the initial tenancy was granted.
The Bedroom Standard	The Bedroom Standard is the most commonly used measure of overcrowding and underoccupation. A standard number of bedrooms is allocated to each household in accordance with its age/sex/marital status composition and the relationship of the members to one another. A separate bedroom is allocated to each married or cohabiting couple, any other person aged 21 or over, each pair of adolescents aged 10 - 20 of the same sex, and each pair of children under 10. Any unpaired person aged 10 - 20 is paired, if possible with a child under 10 of the same sex, or, if that is not possible, he or she is given a separate bedroom, as is any unpaired child under 10.
Choice Based Lettings	Choice Based Lettings is a method of allocating social housing which involves available properties being advertised locally and interested applicants expressing an interest or “bidding” on advertised properties. The property is then offered to the bidder with the highest level of assessed need.
CORE	The Continuous Recording of Lettings and Sales in Social Housing in England (known as CORE) is a national data collection system which records a wide range of information on social housing lettings and sales and the households they are let or sold to. The system provides valuable information for the development of national and local housing policies.
Concealed household	The Halton Strategic Housing Market Assessment defines concealed households as those that need or are likely to form within the next two years. Typically they are currently housed with family or friends and are an important element in considering future need for affordable housing.
Decent Homes Standard	The previous Government set a target that all social housing must meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010. To meet the standard homes must meet the statutory minimum standard for housing (i.e. free from category 1 hazards under the HHSRS – see below), must be warm and weatherproof and have reasonable modern facilities.
Extra care housing	Extra care housing is a form of specialised housing scheme, usually for older people, which provides a range of care and support services on site. It differs from sheltered housing in that it provides a higher level of on site support and includes care services.
Homebuy	Homebuy is the term used by the Government to describe the various different types of shared ownership and shared equity products available to help people buy their own home.
Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)	The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is the national housing and regeneration agency for England. It provides investment for new and improved affordable homes and regeneration projects. It is also the main regulatory body for Registered Providers of social housing.
Household reference person	The Strategic Housing Market Assessment uses the term Household Reference Person to describe the person completing the SHMA survey form on behalf of the household.
Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)	The Housing, Health and Safety Rating System replaced the fitness standard as the Principal means of assessing housing conditions in 2004. It uses a risk based scoring approach to assess hazards within the home. The presence of “category 1” hazards indicates that the home is below the statutory minimum standard.
Housing Market Area	A geographical area which is relatively self contained in terms of reflecting peoples choice of location for a new home.
Indices of Multiple	The English Indices of Deprivation measures relative levels of deprivation in small areas of

Deprivation	England called Lower Layer Super Output Areas. It combines a number of indicators, chosen to cover a range of economic, social and housing issues, into a single deprivation score for each small area in England. This allows each area to be ranked relative to one another according to their level of deprivation. The data is produced at Lower Super Output Area level, of which there are 32,482 in the country.
Intermediate housing	Intermediate housing is housing provided at prices and rents above those of social rent but below market rents and prices. Examples include shared ownership, affordable rents and shared equity products.
Landlord Accreditation	Landlord Accreditation schemes are voluntary schemes, often run by local authorities, which encourage good standards in the private rented sector by allowing owners to apply for accredited status to demonstrate that they are a responsible landlord.
Local Development Framework (LDF)	The Local Development Framework (LDF) is the collective name for the local authority's Core Strategy and related planning policies. The National Planning Policy Framework published in 2012 replaces Local Development Frameworks with local plans.
Local Housing Allowance (LHA)	The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) arrangements are a way of working out Housing Benefit for people who rent from a private landlord. LHA rates are based on the size of household and the area in which a person lives to work out the amount of rent which can be met with HB. HB paid under the LHA arrangements is normally paid to the tenant, who will then pay the landlord.
Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)	A Partnership that brings together representatives from local statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors to address local problems, allocate funding and discuss local strategies and initiatives. In Halton the LSP is often referred to as the Halton Strategic Partnership.
New Town Estates	Runcorn's New Town estates sprang up in the late 1960s following the designation of Runcorn as a New Town area in 1964. They were developed as overspill estates to tackle a housing shortage in Liverpool. Initially managed by the Runcorn Development Corporation, the housing was transferred to a variety of housing associations in 1974, following the disbanding of the Corporation.
Older People	In general for the purposes of this document the term "older people" refers to any person aged 65 or over unless otherwise stated. However some housing schemes for older people will accept people over the age of 55.
Private Sector Stock Condition Survey	Local authorities have a statutory duty to keep housing conditions in the area under review. Stock Condition Surveys are the principle means of assessing those conditions. They provide vital evidence to support the development of housing strategies and housing assistance policies. Government guidance recommends that local authorities undertake stock condition surveys every 3 to 5 years.
Regional Spatial Strategy	Regional Spatial Strategies were introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as a means of providing a spatial vision and strategy specific to each region in the country. They set housebuilding targets for each local authority area which were expected to be reflected in local planning policies. Regional Spatial Strategies were abolished by the Coalition Government in July 2010 so that top down targets for house building no longer exist.
Registered Provider	Registered Provider is the new term for providers of social or affordable housing who are registered with the Homes and Communities Agency. They were previously referred to as Registered Social Landlords. They are almost always non profit making Housing Associations or Trusts, although in recent years some private developers have started to build and manage affordable housing and so have also registered with the HCA.
Shared Ownership	Shared Ownership schemes are used to help people to get a foot on the housing ladder by allowing them to buy a proportion of a home with a mortgage while the other proportion is rented, usually from a Registered Provider.
Sheltered housing	Sheltered housing refers to specialist housing schemes, usually for older people, that either have a warden living on site or have access to 24 hour emergency assistance through an alarm system.
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)	Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments (SHLAA) are a key component of the evidence base to support the delivery of sufficient land for housing to meet the community's need for more homes. The aim of a SHLAA is to identify enough developable land in the area on which to deliver new housing for at least the next five years.
Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMA)	Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMA) is a study of the operation of a Housing Market Area (HMA) and of housing need within the area. Since HMAs cover more than one local authority area SHMAs are usually carried out in conjunction with other local authority areas. Government recommends that all local authorities undertake SHMAs on a periodic

Supported accommodation/housing	<p>basis to inform development of their planning and housing policies and has produced guidance for their use.</p> <p>Supported accommodation is a catch all phrase that refers to any type of accommodation that offers on site support to enable occupants to live independently. Examples include young persons hostels, extra care housing and sheltered housing.</p>
Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)	<p>The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) is prepared by local strategic partnerships (LSPs) as a set of goals and actions which they, in representing the residential, business, statutory and voluntary interests of an area, wish to promote. The SCS should inform the Local Development Framework (LDF) and act as an umbrella for all other strategies devised for the area.</p>
Vulnerable people	<p>There is no one definition of vulnerable people which covers all contexts. For safeguarding purposes a vulnerable adult is described as a person:</p> <p>“ Who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.”</p> <p>However a broader definition is sometimes used by Government for the purposes of allocating resources which can include anyone aged 65 or over, disabled people, claiming benefits and/or families with children under 5.</p>

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Foreword

This document sets out a comprehensive overview of housing in Halton in 2012/13. It is intended to provide the evidence base to Halton's Housing Strategy 2013 to 2018 which describes the Council's housing priorities for the coming five years. The findings from the evidence paper have been used as a basis on which to consult with stakeholders and the wider public with a view to developing these future priorities.

The evidence paper sets housing in its policy context and takes account of the wide range of housing reforms introduced by the Coalition Government since 2010 including the Government's Housing Strategy for England; the Localism Act 2011 and Welfare Reform Act 2012.

It uses a range of information sources to build a comprehensive picture of housing including Halton's Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Private Sector Stock Condition Survey and local statistical returns as well as national datasets such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings.

I have pleasure in commending the document to you.

Councillor Phil Harris
Executive Board Member for Housing Strategy

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Further information on this paper and the separate Housing Strategy 2013-18 can be obtained by contacting Joanne Sutton, Halton Borough Council on 0151 511 8750 or emailing: joanne.sutton@halton.gov.uk. This evidence paper is available in different formats upon request.

Part One – Resources

Introduction

In common with many public service areas, Housing budgets have seen substantial reductions over the last 12 to 18 months as a result of the Government policy of deficit reduction. This will, inevitably, impact on our ability to deliver the same level of service that residents have come to expect. The current position with regard to financing the Housing service is set out in this part of the document.

Funding for Council Housing services

Regional Housing Pot

Until April 2011 the Regional Housing Pot was the main source of funding for the Housing Capital Programme, for the most part, funding assistance for housing renewal (grants and loans) and energy efficiency. The Regional Housing Pot funding stream came to an end in April 2011 along with the disestablishment of regional governing bodies. Consequently, the Council's ability to deliver a housing capital programme which adequately meets the needs identified in this evidence paper has been severely compromised. This will be reflected in the Council's Housing Strategy Delivery Plan which will set out our priorities and ambitions for housing in the context of a realistic level of future resources.

New Homes Bonus (NHB)

The New Homes Bonus replaced the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant in April 2011. The intention of NHB is to act as an incentive for local authorities to deliver housing growth by match funding six years worth of Council Tax for each new home built. An additional £350 is paid annually for each affordable home that is built and the grant applies to empty properties that have been brought back into use.

For 2012/13, the authority was awarded £856,871 in New Homes Bonus. While this funding is of course welcome, it is top sliced from the Local Authority Grant Settlement so in effect is not really new money. The funding is not ring fenced for housing use.

Supported housing funding

There have been changes to the way that supported housing is funded. In 2011 the ring fence was removed for Supporting People services nationally and the funding was subsumed into Council's Area Based Grant allocation. In Halton, this has resulted in a 7.6% decrease in the funding available for supported housing services on 2010/11 levels. The allocation for 2012/13 is shown in the figure 1.1 below.

Housing funding 2012/13

Delivery of the housing service in 2012/13 will be supported through a variety of different funding pots as illustrated in figure 1.1 below which shows monetary allocations for housing where these are known. The nature of the funding sources available illustrates an emphasis on services designed to support vulnerable people while there is little funding available for other elements of the strategic housing service e.g. improving housing conditions, bringing empty homes back into use and commissioning research for future strategic development.

Figure 1.1 – Funding sources for strategic housing delivery 2012/13

The table below shows the allocation of capital resources for housing related activity for 2012/13.

	2012/13 Capital Programme
Disabled Facilities Grants (incl. capitalised salaries)	735,000
Energy Promotion	6,000
Stair lifts	250,000
Registered Providers Adaptations (Joint Funding)	550,000
Choice Based Lettings	28,946
Extra Care Naughton Fields	463,186
Bungalows at Halton Lodge	464,000
Sensory Hub	15,000

TOTAL	2,512,132
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The Council will also seek to maximise resources from ad hoc grant opportunities as and when they arise. For example, the Department of Health’s Warm Homes, Healthy People funding stream provided funding for emergency heating and advice schemes to support vulnerable people to keep their homes warm during the winter months of 2012/13.

Other Housing funding

National Affordable Housing Programme

Registered Providers have agreed four year programmes with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to deliver 320 affordable homes in Halton over the next four years. Unfortunately, the way the new funding model is structured means that it is not possible to provide a monetary value at local authority level.

Get Britain Building

The Get Britain Building scheme was announced in the Government’s Housing Strategy as a £400 million investment fund designed to kickstart pipeline developments which have stalled but are otherwise ready to start or progress. The fund which provides commercial loans is mostly aimed at small and medium sized builders whose developments have come to a halt due to the uncertain market conditions. A prospectus providing further details was published in December 2011. Two schemes in Halton were originally shortlisted but now look unlikely to proceed.

Homelessness Grant

Halton provides support for homeless people through an annual grant from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), which for 2011/12 was £50,000. Specific funding of £65,000 has also been allocated in the form of a one off grant for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme to provide support for households in danger of losing their home due to mortgage arrears. In addition, the Cheshire wide Partnership Group has been successful in securing £30,000 from DCLG to assist with the development of prevention initiatives. Halton is also involved with the Merseyside sub regional group which was awarded £470,000 by CLG to develop prevention initiatives such as the No Second Night Out scheme.

Future resources

It is anticipated that future investment will be limited to funding Disabled Facilities Grants and support for other vulnerable groups and that the local authority role in housing may increasingly be more about facilitating and co-ordinating rather than direct investment of resources.

Part Two - Context

National Policy

Laying the Foundations: The Housing Strategy for England

The Housing Strategy for England was launched on 21st November 2011. It sets out, in one overarching document, the Government's plans to address problems in the country's housing market through increasing the supply of homes, reforming social housing, supporting growth in the private rented sector, encouraging local authorities to bring empty homes back into use and improving choice and housing support. Much of the Strategy restated policies that had already been announced, however, there were some new initiatives designed to breathe life into the country's stagnant housing market. Among the most significant announcements were:

- A new £400 million "Get Britain Building" fund for small and medium sized developers whose developments have come to a halt due to uncertain market conditions;
- Introduction of a mortgage indemnity scheme to provide 95% mortgages on new build homes for first time buyers struggling to secure mortgage finance through conventional means;
- A competitive bidding process to encourage large scale, locally planned and community driven development;
- Plans to release enough public sector land to build 100,000 new houses through a "buy now, pay later" deal with developers;
- Consultation on reducing the length of time that must elapse before developers can seek to renegotiate section 106 agreements with local planning authorities;
- £100 million match funding to help bring empty homes back into use, with a further £50 million for those areas worst affected by empty properties;
- Consultation on increasing Right to Buy discounts with plans for every home sold to be replaced by a new home;
- Proposals to reform stamp duty to support large scale investment in the buy to let market;
- An allocation of £400 million for homelessness prevention and the launch of a ministerial working group to address the causes of homelessness;
- A new deal for older peoples housing and encouraging local authorities to make provision for a wide range of housing types including specialised housing for older people.

Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act received Royal Assent on 16th November 2011. The Act sets out plans to give communities and local authorities greater powers and freedoms and introduces new Community Rights such as the Community Right to Challenge the delivery of local authority run services; the Community Right to Bid for assets of community value and the Community Right to Build small developments in their area without the need for planning permission. The Act also introduces a General Power of Competence for local authorities to do anything not specifically forbidden by law and paves the way for neighbourhood planning and directly elected mayors.

The Act also contains a number of Housing reforms which will impact directly on the Council's local authority strategic housing role, including:

- Giving local authorities greater freedom to decide who is eligible to apply for social housing. More recently, the Government has issued new guidance for allocation schemes which, amongst other provisions, gives greater priority for housing to ex servicemen and women. The Property Pool Plus allocations policy is in the process of being reviewed in light of the new guidance.
- Introduction of new fixed term tenancies for social housing tenants and requirement for the local authority to produce a Tenancy Strategy to guide Registered Providers in their use. This is considered in more detail later in this evidence paper.

- The power for local authorities to discharge their statutory homelessness duty through an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector without the applicant's consent.

The Act also changes the regulatory framework for Registered Providers by abolishing the Tenant Services Authority and placing greater emphasis on tenant involvement in regulation with remaining regulatory functions transferring to the Homes and Communities Agency.

Welfare Reform Act 2012

The Welfare Reform Act received Royal Assent on 8th March 2012. The Act has been described as the biggest shake up of the benefits system in 60 years. It aims to simplify the system and create the right incentives to get people into work by ensuring that no individual is better off by not working.

Key features of the Act that will have the most significant impact on Halton's residents are:

- Introduction of Universal Credit. The level of Universal Credit is to be capped at £26,000. While it is estimated that only a small number of Halton residents will see their income reduce as a result of the cap, some will be very significantly affected (up to £500 per week). In addition, Housing Benefit is to be included in Universal Credit and will consequently be paid directly to tenants of social housing. There are fears that this will lead to an increase in rent arrears which, in turn, could lead to a rise in homelessness and could impact upon the ability of Registered Providers to secure private investment at competitive rates to maximise their capacity to deliver additional affordable housing.
- Replacement of Disability Living Allowance with a Personal Independent Payment (PIP) for those of working age. Halton, which has been selected as a pilot area for the scheme, has a disproportionate amount of disabled residents and the change to PIP will involve a reduction in the numbers of those receiving financial assistance.
- Changes to Housing Benefit including the introduction of an under occupancy penalty for households whose homes are deemed to be too large for their needs. Described as the "Bedroom Tax", this change will have a very significant impact in Halton, where it is estimated that as many as 3,000 social housing tenants could lose benefits. The situation is compounded by a shortage of smaller properties in the Borough to facilitate downsizing. Changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA), most significantly the extension of the age threshold for the shared accommodation rate from 25 to 35. This will affect around 234 claimants in Halton, whose benefit entitlement will reduce from £91.15 to £53.54 per week. Private tenants will also be affected by plans to uprate LHA by the Consumer Price Index rather than the Retail Price Index currently used.

It is too early to assess the impact of other reforms such as the ongoing reassessment of Incapacity Benefit claimants against the stricter criteria of the Employment Support Allowance, changes to Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans and forthcoming reforms to Council Tax benefit which will include a 10% cut in scheme funding and "localised" benefit schemes.

National Planning Policy Framework

The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 27th March 2012. It sets out, in a more condensed version of previous guidance, the Government's planning policies and how it expects these to be applied and aims to simplify the country's planning system to achieve sustainable development.

The NPPF replaces the need for Local Development Frameworks with Local Plans which local authorities must develop to meet objectively assessed needs and which must have sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change. For housing development, it reaffirms the requirement to assess need through a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (preferably developed in conjunction with other authorities in the Housing Market Area) and to identify opportunities to meet that need through the development of a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.

The framework has a clear emphasis on growth and on accelerating the planning process. A key challenge for the development and delivery of Local Plans will be how to balance the need for rapid housing and economic growth with the need to protect Green Belt and to promote the highest possible standards of sustainable development.

Affordable Rents

Affordable rent is the new rent model which the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) expect that Registered Providers will adopt for new build housing and for an agreed proportion of existing stock as it becomes vacant. Affordable rents are set at up to 80% of market rents in the area. The additional income raised through affordable rents is to be invested in new housing development and it is anticipated will help fund the shortfall as a result of significant cuts to the HCA National Affordable Housing Programme. While this could lead to an increase in rent levels for some tenants and could result in a two tier system whereby tenants in similar properties are paying different rents, it is likely that the impact in Halton will not be as great as in higher value areas due to relatively low private rents in the Borough.

Sub Regional context

Liverpool City Region Housing and Spatial Planning Forum

Halton Borough Council is represented on the Liverpool City Region Housing and Spatial Planning Forum, which acts as an advisory group to the Liverpool City Region Cabinet on housing and planning issues. The Forum provides the mechanism for the co-ordination of activity between the participating local authority areas and is a key delivery agent in developing and implementing the priorities contained within the Local Investment Plan described below.

Examples of sub regional projects overseen by the Forum include:

- Development and implementation of the sub regional Choice Based Letting Scheme Property Pool Plus (described in more detail later in this evidence paper);
- A co-ordinated approach to delivery of the successful bids to HCA to bring empty homes back into use, including development of a standardised lease agreement and inspection report;
- Co-ordination of affordable housing delivery and stalled/pipeline sites with a view to maximising funding opportunities to kickstart development.

The Group provides an opportunity to pool knowledge, experience, skills and resources from participating local authority areas with a view to maximising housing investment, choice and provision for the city region area and support the economic potential of the sub region.

Liverpool City Region Local Investment Plan 2

The Liverpool City Region Local Investment Plan (LIP) 2011-15 builds on the success of the interim plan for 2010/11 which has helped to secure over £80m of housing and regeneration investment in the City Region. The LIP has three primary roles:

- As a prospectus for housing and regeneration investment in the Liverpool City Region;
- To clarify the City Region's priorities to support economic growth whilst maintaining the momentum of regeneration;
- Inform HCA's business plan by setting clear priorities for future investment in the City Region.

The Plan identifies the challenges facing the City Region and the priorities for action, including:

- Raising the quality of and diversification of the housing offer as a means to harness economic potential;
- Bringing long term empty properties back into use as a means of increasing the supply of affordable housing;
- Addressing housing market failure in the core conurbations of Liverpool, Wirral and Sefton and also prioritise investment in the areas with greatest economic potential and market strength;
- Working with Registered Providers to ensure an appropriate mix of development based on evidence from Strategic Housing Market Assessments;
- Making best use of the existing stock, including developing measures to address under occupation;
- Developing opportunities for institutional investment in the private rented sector;
- Meeting the needs of an ageing population and supporting vulnerable people;

- Maximising the development opportunities presented by public landholdings in the City Region.

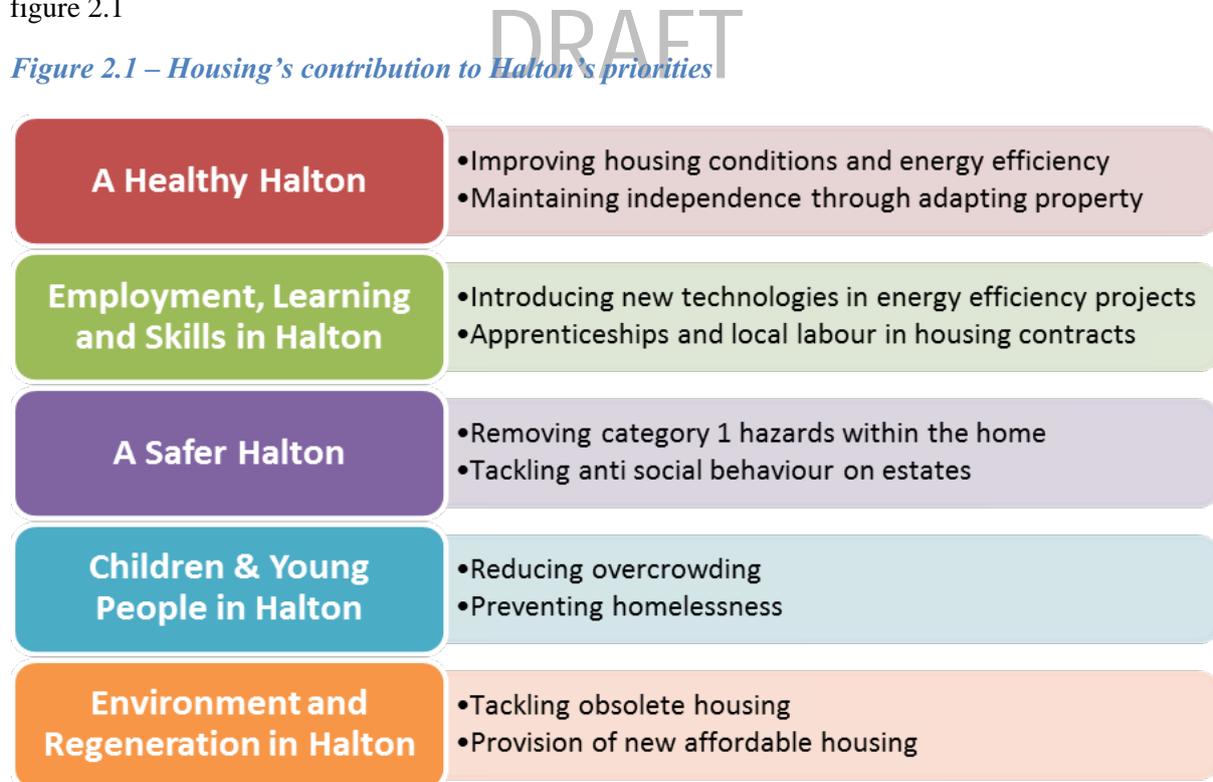
Local Context

Halton’s Sustainable Community Strategy 2011-2026

Halton’s Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the vision for the Halton that the Council and its partners, under the umbrella of the Halton Strategic Partnership, would like to see emerge by 2026. The Strategy’s five priority themes are:

- A Healthy Halton
- Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton
- A Safer Halton
- Halton’s Children and Young People
- Halton’s Environment and Regeneration

Housing has a significant contribution to make to each of the five priority themes as illustrated in figure 2.1



Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan presents the Council’s response to how it will help implement the Community Strategy. This is achieved through a framework consisting of a hierarchy of Directorate, Divisional and Team Service Plans known as “the Golden Thread” that are directly aligned to ensure that the strategic priorities are cascaded down through the organisation through outcome focused targets.

The five strategic priorities are also mirrored in the make up of the Council’s Policy and Performance Boards which, together with the Executive Board, provide political leadership of the Council.

Progress in achieving the objectives contained in the Service Plans is reviewed regularly as part of the Council's performance management culture, and further scrutiny is exercised by Members through the Policy and Performance Boards.

Halton's Core Strategy

Halton's Core Strategy was adopted in November 2012 having been through Examination in Public and having been subject to examination by the Planning Inspectorate. The Strategy sets a minimum housing requirement of 9,930 net additional homes between 2010 and 2028, equating to 552 dwellings per annum. It is anticipated that almost 60% of the dwellings over the Strategy period are to be built in Runcorn. An average of at least 40% of new residential development should be developed on previously developed (brownfield) land over the period.

New homes will be delivered from a variety of sources including from sites currently available for housing development where work is either underway, planning permission has been granted or the site has been allocated for residential development and from sites which have the potential to contribute to housing land supply e.g. identified housing opportunities within Key Areas of Change (i.e. 3MG site at Ditton, South Widnes, East Runcorn and West Runcorn), new housing or mixed use allocations in subsequent Development Plans and appropriate windfall development. In accordance with Government guidance the Council will seek to maintain a 5 year supply of deliverable housing land.

The Strategy identifies opportunities to develop 1,400 homes in Daresbury and 1,400 homes in Sandymoor in Runcorn East and 1,500 homes in Runcorn West, mainly on the Runcorn Waterfront site.

The Core Strategy contains an affordable housing requirement of 25% of the total residential units proposed on schemes comprising 10 or more dwellings (net gain) or 0.33 hectares or greater for residential purposes. The Council will seek to secure an equal split between social/affordable rent tenures and intermediate housing tenures across the Borough. Provision of affordable housing must meet the identified housing needs as set out in the most up to date Strategic Housing Market Assessment and is to be provided in perpetuity. The affordable housing contribution may only be reduced where robust and credible evidence is provided to demonstrate that the affordable housing target would make the scheme unviable.

An Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document has been adopted to support the policy which provides additional guidance for all parties involved in the delivery of affordable housing through the planning system.

Tenancy Strategy

In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, Halton has developed a Tenancy Strategy which sets out what types of tenancies the Council recommends that Registered Providers should offer locally, the length of those tenancies and the circumstances in which they should be offered and renewed. The Strategy, which was formally adopted by the Council in September 2012, recommends that Providers continue to offer Lifetime tenancies but recognises that Providers may wish to make use of the new fixed term tenancies introduced by the Localism Act to make the best use of their housing stock. Where this is the case, the Strategy advises that fixed term tenancies should be for a minimum of five years and are not suitable for:

- Existing social housing tenants who became assured tenants prior to 1st April 2012 and who are transferring to another property;
- Where the property is part of a supported housing development that provides specialist accommodation for particular client groups, including sheltered housing.
- Where the tenant is someone over the prevailing state retirement age.
- Where the property is located in an area of very low demand and/or high multiple deprivation where the local authority has serious concerns about the long term sustainability of the area. In these circumstances, the local authority will initiate discussions with the relevant Provider(s) to request that they temporarily suspend the use of fixed term tenancies in that area.
- Where a tenant with a secure or assured tenancy is required by a Provider to move due to redevelopment e.g. they are being required to move, not seeking to do so.

The Strategy also recommends that in most cases fixed term tenancies are renewed upon review, particularly where the household contains children or has been offered in response to particular set of vulnerabilities and the household is still assessed as being vulnerable or the property has been adapted to meet the needs of a disabled person and that person still resides in the property and needs the adaptations. The circumstances in which it is recognised that Providers may not wish to renew the tenancy are where:

- There has been a substantial improvement in the household's financial circumstances to the extent that continued occupation of the property by the household would present a conflict with the charitable objectives or primary purpose of Providers to provide housing for those in necessitous circumstances.
- There has been a change in the composition of the household which has resulted in the household under occupying the accommodation.
- An adapted property is no longer suitable for the tenant's needs e.g. where adaptations have been provided for a disabled person who is no longer resident in the property, the adaptations are no longer required, and there are other families needing this type of adapted accommodation.

In the latter two circumstances the Strategy advises that Providers should seek to offer suitable alternative accommodation in their own or another Provider's stock. The Council does not expect fixed term tenancies to be used as a means of enforcing tenancy conditions but recognises that there may be cases where enforcement action is so far advanced that it may not be appropriate to renew the tenancy.

Part Three – Halton’s Housing

Overview

Tenure

Halton’s housing stock can be characterised by a relatively high proportion of social rented properties (around 25%), resulting from the development and subsequent transfer of housing in Runcorn’s New Town estates, and a private sector skewed towards lower value, semi detached and terraced homes. Figure 3.1 illustrates the growth in the private sector (20% in the 12 years from 1999 to 2011) and the steady decline in the total social housing stock of around 15%. As illustrated in the chart, the Council transferred its housing stock to a newly created Housing Association, Halton Housing Trust, in December 2005.

Figure 3.1 – Halton’s housing stock from 1999 (from HSSA returns)

More recently the Borough has witnessed a dramatic growth in the private rented sector, from only 4% of the total housing stock at the time of the 2001 Census to 10%. It is thought that this is due to limited mortgage availability and long waiting lists for social housing fuelling demand for the sector, and the availability of Buy to Let mortgages and concept of housing as a long term investment fuelling supply. This growth has included the Council examining its approach to the sector as part of a Member led scrutiny review, which is described later in this document.

Census data from 2011 allows us to compare Halton’s stock profile with that of national and regional housing profiles and with neighbouring local authorities as shown in figure 3.2 below. As illustrated, Halton has a larger than average social rented sector and a relatively small private rented sector.

Figure 3.2 - Sub regional tenure comparison (Census 2011)

Property values

The stock profile in Halton is skewed towards lower value properties, with 68% of dwellings in Council Tax Bands A or B, as illustrated in figure 3.3 below.

Figure 3.3 – Breakdown of Council Tax Bands in Halton

Analysis of Council Tax Band by ward, as illustrated below, reveals that the lowest value stock is concentrated unsurprisingly in the wards containing the highest proportions of social housing. Higher value properties are concentrated in Birchfield, Daresbury and Hale wards.

Figure 3.4 – Council Tax bands by wards

Empty Homes

The proportion of long term empty private homes in Halton at around 1.5% to 2.2% is consistent with Regional figures and those of neighbouring local authorities. Figure 3.5 below shows the number of vacancies over 6 months in both the private and social rented sectors.

Figure 3.5 – Vacancies over 6 months

Analysis of the geographical spread of all empty homes reveals no neighbourhood or street level “hotspots”, however, the three wards with the highest proportions: Mersey (6.61%), Riverside (5.63%) and Appleton (4.49%) are those containing more properties in Council Tax Bands A and Band private rented properties suggesting a connection between these factors. The Council takes

action to remedy empty homes where a complaint is received and is supportive of initiatives to reduce the number of empty homes as and when funding is available. For example the Council has recently worked with Halton Housing Trust to secure HCA funding to bring 8 empty homes back into use through acquisition. Additional resources would be needed to take a more pro active approach.

A survey of owners of long term empty private sector homes undertaken in 2009 revealed that around 41% required investment to bring them back into use, although in the majority of cases improvement or modernisation work was already underway. The majority of respondents indicated that they anticipated that the property would be occupied within a 12 month period, only 10% thought it would still be empty due to either the level of work required or current market conditions.

The number of long term vacant properties in the social housing stock varies greatly from year to year as illustrated above. However, the numbers are heavily influenced by the current state of play with regard to regeneration programmes. For example, the increase in 2011 is due largely to the number of properties awaiting demolition in Castlefields as part of the ten year Masterplan. Consequently, the number of social housing properties empty for more than 6 months, which under normal circumstances represents less than 1% of the total social housing stock, is not a cause for concern.

New housing

Figure 3.6 illustrates the number of newly built properties in the Borough as reported in Housing Flows Reconciliation returns. The chart demonstrates the impact of the recent economic downturn on new build completions, which have fallen by over 500% on peak levels in 2005/06 and fall way below the former target of 500 per annum set out in the now defunct North West Regional Spatial Strategy.

Figure 3.6 – New build completions 2000 onwards

Source: DCLG Housing Flows Reconciliation returns

The chart also demonstrates growth in social housing developments over recent years, part funded by the Homes and Communities Agency’s (HCA) National Affordable Development Programme. Registered Providers in Halton have agreed their development programmes with the HCA for the four year period 2011 to 2015, resulting in the following planned new developments.

	1 Bed Flat	2 Bed Flat	2 Bed Bungalow	2 Bed House	3 Bed House	Total
Runcorn	0	38	7	26	48	119
Widnes	39	116	5	11	30	201
Total	39	154	12	37	78	320

In addition to the above, a new 47 unit extra care scheme at Naughton Fields, Liverpool Road, Widnes funded from 2008/11 National Affordable Housing Programme has recently been developed.

Halton’s Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment allows us to forecast the number of total expected completions for Runcorn and Widnes for the four years to 2016/17. Note that at this stage tenure is unknown so these figures include both market and affordable anticipated housing development.

	Approx Completed Units 2013/14	Approx Completed Units 2014/15	Approx Completed Units 2015/16	Approx Completed Units 2016/17
Runcorn	232	502	688	560
Widnes	338	328	441	165

The Council is keen to fulfil its role in facilitating new housing development through the Local Development Framework and has prepared a comprehensive list of potential housing development sites that are likely to come forward over the next 15 years. These are contained in a document called the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, which is updated annually. This can be viewed at <http://www3.halton.gov.uk/environmentandplanning/planning/294413/>.

The Housing Market

House prices

Average house prices in Halton are lower than regional averages and significantly lower than national averages as illustrated in figure 3.7. Based on provisional estimates at quarter 3 2012 the average house price in Halton was £133,550 which was £23,693 lower than the North West average.

Figure 3.7 – Average house prices

Source: Land Registry

Historically house prices in Halton along with those in Knowsley have tended to be the lowest in the Liverpool City Region. However latest figures (quarter 3 2012) suggest that local average house prices have overtaken Knowsley and St Helens and are more on a par with Liverpool as shown in Figure 3.8.

Figure 3.8 – Sub regional comparison of average house prices (Quarter 3 2012)

In common with the regional and national position, the economic downturn and consequential housing market conditions has led to a dramatic decrease in the number of sales as demonstrated by figure 3.9, declining by almost 60% between the peak at quarter 3 2007 and the corresponding quarter in 2011.

Figure 3.9 – Average sales

Source: Land Registry

Analysis at ward level at figure 3.10 reveals the disparity in house prices across the Borough. Average house prices in Daresbury and Birchfield which have a high proportion of new build, executive style homes are almost four times as much as those in the area with the lowest average house price in quarter 3 2011 (Halton Lea). Average house prices in wards containing New Town estates and those with a high proportion of smaller terraces and private rented stock (e.g. Appleton and Mersey) are unsurprisingly lower.

Figure 3.10 – Average House Prices Quarter 3 2011

Source: Land Registry

Rent levels

The Halton Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) used CORE data on new social lettings and Valuation Office Data to compare the relative rent levels in the social and private rented stock. Figure 3.11 illustrates this differential.

Figure 3.11 – Average monthly private and social rent levels 2009/10

As shown, social rents were found to equate to around 58% of prevailing market rents, indicating the potential impact of the new affordable rent regime which, if rents are raised to the full 80% threshold, would see the average monthly rent for a 3 bedroom social rented property rise to around £460 per month. The SHMA also found that rent levels in the social housing sector were increasing at a much faster rate (up by around 27% on 2004/05 levels) than private rents, which had remained relatively static over the same period.

Affordability

The Halton Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2011 collected a range of information regarding household financial circumstances relevant to their ability to afford market housing in order to assess the level of annual affordable housing need. In summary, the findings were that:

- Average gross household income was £25,662 with a much lower median income level of £18,954.
- Average household savings were £3,756 (taking into account non mortgage debts) but again the median was much lower at £290.
- Around a third of households were in debt and a further quarter had no savings.
- Average equity was £95,138 and 1,588 households were in negative equity.
- An estimated 4,307 new households were likely to form in the next two years.
- Around 40% of these had an income of less than £10,000 and 81% less than £20,000.

Using the affordability criteria below, the survey found that around 32% of households were unable to afford home ownership. When taking into account the need for a 20% deposit requirement this figure increased to 46.5%.

“Assessing whether a household can afford home ownership - A household is considered able to afford to buy a home if the residual cost is no more than 3.5 times the gross household income. The residual cost is calculated by deducting any capital that is available for use towards home ownership (e.g. savings or equity) from the overall cost of the home.”

Using the Government recommended model which takes into account backlog and newly arising need and likely future supply, the survey assessed a need for 891 affordable homes per annum for the next five years, 65% for social/affordable rent and the remaining 35% split between intermediate rent, shared ownership and low cost home ownership. This figure represents a significant increase on the 2006 Housing Needs Survey which estimated a need at that time for 176 affordable homes per annum, clearly demonstrating the impact that the economic downturn has had on the housing market. However, given an overall average target of 552 new homes within Halton’s Core Strategy delivery of 891 affordable homes per annum appears unrealistic.

Analysis of median house prices compared to average incomes reveals that Halton has an affordability ratio of 4.8, lower than the regional ratio of 5.2 and significantly lower than the national affordability ratio of 7.0. Figure 3.12 below illustrates how the affordability ratio has increased since the house price boom at the turn of the century.

Figure 3.12 – House price to income affordability ratio

The SHMA also estimated the income levels required to access two bedroomed accommodation in the owner occupied, private rented and social rented sectors without subsidy in Runcorn and Widnes, with the results shown in figure 3.13.

Figure 3.13 – Indicative income required to purchase/rent without subsidy

Supply and Demand for housing

Information on the supply and demand for social housing can be obtained from the annual English Local Authority Statistics on Housing (formerly Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix) which collects data on the number of people on the Council's waiting list and the number of homes available for letting during the year. Figure 3.14 below illustrates the widening gap between the number of people registered for social housing and the total available lettings during the year, indicating the impact of recent housing market conditions on mobility within the sector.

Figure 3.14 – Supply and demand for social housing

Further analysis of the waiting list reveals the need for smaller one and two bedroom accommodation, as illustrated in figure 3.15 below. This is reflective of smaller household sizes and the number of single and couple households on the waiting list. The drop in the number of applications in 2012 as shown in the graph below reflects the fact that at the time the data was collected Halton Housing Trust was midway through a re-registration exercise in preparation for the move to Choice Based Lettings.

Figure 3.15 – Housing waiting list – number of bedrooms required Source: ELASH/HSSA returns - NB Prior to 2005 data for 1 and 2 beds was combined.

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment collected information on tenure aspirations and expectations of existing and concealed households who indicated that they needed or were likely to move within the next two years.

Figure 3.16 – Aspirations and expectations of households looking to move

The results, illustrated in figure 3.16, reveal the strength of demand for home ownership but the much lower expectation that this would be attained, particularly from concealed households. Social housing was also in demand but households felt that this was more attainable. There was relatively low demand for private rented housing although the responses to the question of expectation reveal the extent to which the private rented sector is seen as attainable and is to some extent “plugging the gap” in meeting housing need. The survey revealed little demand for shared ownership, however, the relative scarcity of intermediate housing in Halton could have had a bearing on this.

Perhaps unsurprisingly there was a high level of demand for three or four bedroomed detached or semi detached housing amongst existing households. Three quarters of existing households expected to move within Halton with the Birchfield/Farnworth/Halton View area reported as the most popular location.

Only 55% of concealed households expected to move within Halton and while demand was also high for a detached or semi detached house, 56% expected that they would move to a flat or maisonette with similar proportions willing to accept one bedroom accommodation.

Housing Conditions

Decent Homes

The Decent Homes Standard uses four broad criteria to assess housing conditions, that is that housing should:

- A - be above the legal minimum standard for housing (measured by the presence of category 1 hazards under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System), and
- B - be in a reasonable state of repair, and
- C - have reasonably modern facilities (such as kitchens and bathrooms) and services, and
- D - provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort (effective insulation and efficient heating).

Just over a quarter (26.2%) of private sector dwellings in Halton failed the Decency Standard at the time of the latest Private Sector Stock Condition Survey, equating to 10,500 dwellings. This was significantly lower than the national rate of 36.3% (English House Condition Survey 2006) and the North West rate of 37% (“Establishing a Decency Baseline for the Private Sector in the North West”). The most common reason for failing the Standard was due to a poor degree of thermal comfort affecting over half of non decent properties followed by the need for repair and the presence of a Category 1 hazard. Only 300 properties failed due to a lack of modern facilities. This is illustrated in figure 3.17 which gives a comparison of the proportions failing the standard for each reason in the owner occupied and private rented stock and with national figures from the English House Condition Survey 2006.

Figure 3.17 – Proportion of homes failing the decent homes standard by reason for failure

The total cost to remedy each criteria is as follows:

- Category 1 hazards - £21 million
- In need of repair - £18 million
- Lacking modern facilities - £3 million
- Thermal comfort - £9 million

Higher rates of non decency are found in Runcorn than Widnes (27.8% compared to 24.5%) with pre 1919 terraced stock more likely to be affected.

Around 29% of vulnerable households living in the private rented sector were found to live in non decent homes, equating to 4,420 households, with vulnerable households living in Runcorn more likely to be living in non decent homes than those in Widnes. Other households that were more likely to live in non decent homes include households with an income of under £10,000 (35%) and those where the head of household is under 25 (41%).

Halton Borough Council collects annual data from Registered Providers related to the condition of their stock. Data for 2011 reveals that all social housing stock in Halton met the Decent Homes Standard and none contained category 1 hazards under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System. It can, therefore, be concluded that the social housing stock in Halton is in good condition.

Category 1 hazards

The Housing, Health and Safety Rating System replaced the Fitness Standard in 2004, as the principal method of assessing housing standards for local authorities. It adopts a risk based scoring approach which measures the likelihood and severity of certain hazards occurring within the home, with those properties scoring above a certain threshold deemed to contain Category 1 hazards.

The Halton Stock Condition Survey found that 4,400 dwellings contained Category 1 hazards with 3,900 being houses and an estimated 500 flats. This represents 11% of the private sector stock which is significantly lower than the national and regional figure (23.5% and 44% respectively).

Almost two thirds of all category 1 hazards identified by the survey were attributable to excess cold with falls on the level and falls on stairs being the second and third most common hazard. Figure 3.18 shows the results of the survey in relation to all Category 1 hazards.

Figure 3.18 – Reason for category 1 hazards in private properties

The survey found that Category 1 hazards are more prevalent in terraced houses (47% of terraced stock) and flats (32% of flats) and that the proportion of properties containing Category 1 hazards increases according to the age band of the dwelling, with 26% of pre 1919 dwellings containing Category 1 hazards compared to 3% of dwellings built post 1990.

A higher rate of Category 1 hazards was found in Runcorn than Widnes (12% compared to 10%). Higher rates were also found in dwellings occupied by households with an income under £10,000 (15%), on benefit (14%), where the head of household is under 25 (23.5%) or over 65 (12%) and for households containing someone with a disability (13%).

Figure 3.19 illustrates the cost of remedying Category 1 hazards, ranging from a total cost of £20 million, averaging £4,800 per dwelling, just to remedy the hazards to £80 million for comprehensive repair to all dwellings containing Category 1 hazards, at an average of £17,900 per dwelling. Although total costs to remedy hazards in the private rented sector are lower, the average cost per dwelling just to remedy category 1 hazards at £6,200 is higher than for owner occupied properties at £4,400 per dwelling.

Figure 3.19 – Cost to remedy category 1 hazards

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Energy efficiency

The Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) uses a scale of 1 to 100 to assess the relative energy efficiency of dwellings with higher ratings indicating higher levels of energy efficiency. The Private Sector Stock Condition Survey undertaken in 2009 found that on average energy efficiency levels in the private stock (owner occupied and rented) were higher than the national and regional averages (Average SAP rating of 56 in Halton compared to 49 and 51 respectively). It found that there had been a significant improvement on the average SAP rating of 48 recorded by the previous Stock Condition Survey undertaken in 2003, indicating substantial improvements in the energy efficiency of the stock in the intervening period.

Figure 3.20 shows the distribution of SAP ratings for each tenure and compares these with the national distribution using data from the English House Condition Survey 2009.

Figure 3.20 – Distribution of SAP ratings in the private sector

The least energy efficient dwellings are, unsurprisingly, pre 1919 terraces and the most energy efficient dwellings are post 1990 purpose built flats. There was no difference between SAP ratings for Runcorn than those for Widnes.

National Indicator 187 measured the proportion of households on an income related benefit living in dwellings with SAP ratings below 35 and 65 and above. The last survey completed found that 6.8% of households in receipt of an income related benefit live in a dwelling with a SAP rating below 35 and that 24.2% live in a dwelling with a SAP rating of 65 and over.

Figure 3.21 illustrates the improvements that would be necessary to bring all private sector homes up to standard. As shown, virtually all 40,100 properties in the sector would benefit from some type of improvement with loft insulation (whether full or top up) required to around 97% of dwellings to bring up to current recommended levels of 270mm. Obviously, not all of these dwellings would need or qualify for financial support to carry out these improvements but, as an indication, the total cost of installing all these measures is £54.3 million, equating to an average of £1,350 per dwelling.

Figure 3.21 – Energy efficiency measures needed (owner occupiers and private rented)

Castlefields Regeneration

The Castlefields Regeneration Partnership was established in 2002 to tackle serious decline and deprivation on the Castlefields New Town estate in Runcorn. Founding partners include local residents, Halton Borough Council, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), Liverpool Housing Trust (LHT) and Plus Dane Group. As it has embraced new opportunities the partnership has grown to include NHS Halton & St Helens, partner contractors Cruden Construction and Seddon, John McCall architects, Sutcliffe engineers, Bradley Demolition, developer Keepmoat, local artists and the business community.

Over its ten year lifespan, 1,203 deck access units have been demolished, with a further 80 units programmed for demolition in 2012. These have been replaced by 747 new build homes, with 80 new homes currently under construction and a further 400 homes planned over coming years. In December 2011 the 1st phase of the Village Square opened with completion of new shops and flats, this was followed in March 2012 with the opening of a new Community Centre and extensive public realm. A new health centre was opened in May 2012, with a formal grand opening in the summer 2012. Other environmental improvements continue to be delivered within the neighbourhood. A first phase of intervention covering a proportion of the 500 two-storey system built houses was announced in March 2012, this will include external wall and roof cladding to improve the energy efficiency of the properties and the visual amenity of the neighbourhood.

This year, residents will determine priorities for the next ten years and create a continuing action plan. The partnership is committed to the long-term future of Castlefields and in 2012 will deliver a significant public art commission, develop the first private housing for outright sale and introduce innovative energy efficiency technologies to existing homes.

The Partnership is naturally proud of its achievements in transforming the once low demand area of Castlefields to an area of choice for homeseekers and its efforts have been rewarded with a Housing Excellence Award for Best Partnership of 2012. In addition, Castlefields was shortlisted for the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors North West Award for the Village Square development and the UK Housing Award for Partnership of the Year.

The Private Rented Sector

As mentioned earlier in this document, the private rented sector is the fastest growing housing sector in Halton and in the current economic climate is to an extent filling the gap in meeting housing needs as a result of limited mortgage availability and reduced mobility in the social housing sector. This is borne out by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, which found that a much higher proportion of households expected that their next move would be to privately rented accommodation than expressed the sector as their tenure of choice.

Despite this growth it must be remembered that private rented housing still forms only a small proportion of the housing stock when compared to other areas as demonstrated in figure 3.2 earlier in this document with an estimated 5,000 properties in Halton owned by private landlords.

The vast majority of landlords are responsible and the Council will continue to develop pro active working relationships with those landlords who wish to improve the standard of their properties and management approaches through voluntary accreditation (described below).

However, other than for certain categories of Houses in Multiple Occupation (of which there are very few in Halton) the sector is largely unregulated. Evidence from the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey reveals that private tenants are more likely to live in a property containing a Category 1 hazard than owner occupiers (17% of private rented compared to 10% of owner occupied housing) and that a third of private tenants live in homes which do not meet the Decency Standard compared to a quarter of owner occupiers.

Levels of energy efficiency are also lower in the sector with average SAP ratings of 53 compared to 57 for owner occupied housing. The Energy Act 2011 states that by April 2016 private landlords cannot unreasonably refuse requests from their tenants for consent to have energy efficiency improvements carried out where financial support is available for example through the Green Deal or

Energy Company Obligation. The Act further requires that by April 2018 all privately rented properties should be brought up to minimum standards of energy efficiency (likely to be set at Energy Performance Certificate rating E).

In addition, the termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy was the second highest reason for homelessness in the Borough in 2011/12, the numbers having trebled on the previous year, which is in part likely to be as a result of changes to the Local Housing Allowance introduced as part of the current agenda of welfare reform.

The Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities the power to discharge their statutory homelessness duty through an offer of private rented accommodation. At the time of writing the Council has yet to consider its position on this, however, if this policy is adopted locally the accommodation offered will, in accordance with Government Guidance, at least meet suitability standards.

In common with many other local authorities, the Council takes a dual approach to the private rented sector with, on the one hand, the accreditation scheme rewarding “responsible” landlords while on the other the Council uses its enforcement powers to take action against less scrupulous landlords whose properties do not meet a satisfactory standard. These two approaches are described in more detail below.

Landlord Accreditation Scheme

Halton’s Landlord Accreditation Scheme has been running for approximately seven years. It is a free and voluntary scheme which offers a range of benefits to qualifying landlords including fast tracking of benefit applications, insurance discounts, seminar invitations and general guidance and support. Landlords must meet required minimum standards to be eligible for accreditation covering the condition of their properties and management standards.

56 landlords have applied for accreditation covering 308 properties out of a total of around 5,000 in the sector. Out of these 34 landlords have reached the required standards to be accredited. A database of known private landlords with properties in Halton has been compiled and these are written to periodically to encourage them to seek accreditation. The scheme is also publicised in newsletters and the Council’s website.

All known landlords are invited to a quarterly Landlords’ Forum which provides opportunity for formal discussion on a wide range of relevant issues and for landlords to network and informally discuss issues of common interest. Forum meetings are generally well attended and provoke lively discussion and interesting debate.

Enforcement

Local authorities have a range of powers at their disposal to deal with poor conditions and nuisance in the private rented sector. Halton’s Environmental Services team deal with a wide range of enforcement issues, not just housing, including noise nuisance and air and environmental quality. On receiving a complaint from a private tenant, the team will carry out an inspection of the property and if it is found to be below the minimum standard will contact the landlord to request that the remedial works are carried out. In most cases this informal approach works as the landlord quickly responds to the request. However, in some isolated cases, enforcement action, usually involving issuing statutory compliance notices under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, is necessary.

Scrutiny Review into the Private Rented Sector

In 2011 elected members from the Safer Halton Policy and Performance Board undertook a scrutiny review into the Private Rented Sector. The review was prompted by a number of complaints of anti social behaviour from private sector tenants and what was felt to be an inadequate response from absentee private landlords.

Members made a number of recommendations including piloting a more pro active approach to the sector, promoting Council services to tenants and landlords in those areas, encouraging landlords to register contact details and apply to join the accreditation scheme and tenants to report any issues with their property to the Council so that they can be taken up with the landlord and, where necessary, enforcement action taken.

An officer working group has been set up to take forward the recommendations.

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Part Four – Halton’s People

Overview

Population

The latest ONS mid year population estimates (2010) indicate that there are 119,300 people resident in the Borough. Halton has experienced population growth since 2006 as a result of a combination of higher levels of natural change (more births than deaths) which have outweighed lower (albeit sustained) levels of net out migration. Another factor in this may have been the delivery of larger, more aspirational housing at Upton Rocks in Widnes and Sandymoor in Runcorn which has helped to enhance the housing offer at the upper end of the scale and attracted new residents who may not otherwise have moved to the area.

The overall population is projected to grow to 121,400 by 2018 and 122,900 by 2023 (4% on the latest estimates from 2008) although this growth is lower than the regional and national growth projections of 5% and 11% respectively.

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Age

Comparison of the age profile of Halton residents with regional and national figures shows a population skewed towards younger people as illustrated in figure 4.1. For example, an estimated 19% of Halton’s residents are under the age of 15 compared to 17.5% regionally and nationally and there are lower proportions of people aged 75 and over. This relatively young population structure is partly as a consequence of the movement of young families to the Runcorn New Town estates. However, these first generation New Town residents are getting older and are expected to reach retirement age in the period to 2026.

Figure 4.1 – Age profile of the population

Data from the Office of National Statistics shows the projected change in the population by age band to 2023, as below:

- Younger people (0 - 14 year olds) - population projected to grow by 7% (2008 - 2023)
- Working age (16 - 64 year olds) - population projected to decline by 6% (2008 - 2023)
- Older people (65+) - population projected to grow by 43% from 16,900 in 2008 to 24,200 in 2023

Of particular significance to housing provision is the projected growth in the older population. The housing needs of older people will be explored in more detail later in this evidence paper.

Ethnicity

The 2010 Strategic Housing Market Assessment confirmed that Halton has a very small black and minority ethnic (BME) population with 97.6% of households describing themselves as White British. Although the number of respondents was too small to produce wholly reliable results the survey does suggest a small growth in the White Other population, which might be expected as a result of the accession of new member states into the European Union over recent years and also of Mixed Race populations. The survey also found that as a whole BME households are:

- typically larger than households headed by a White British/Irish person (an average of 2.74 people compared to 2.37 within the White population);
- less likely to rent accommodation (both social and private) and are far more likely than average to be owner occupiers with a mortgage (59% compared to 39% for White households);
- notably less likely than White households to contain a household member with a support need;

- record an average household income of £33,480 which is higher than the comparative figure for White households of £25,512. However, it should be noted that there are a greater proportion of working age BME households in Halton than there are White working age households.

It is important to note that the response to the survey from BME households was small (46 responses) and so the above findings should be treated with a degree of caution, however, the last Housing Needs Survey in 2006 also recorded similar findings.

Households

At 2011 there were 53,300 households living in Halton, representing a 11% increase since the 2001 Census and an 16% increase since the 1991 Census. Figure 4.2 below illustrates the dramatic increase. While recent population growth will be a factor in this increase, the main reason is a fall in household size.

Figure 4.2 – Number of households in Halton

The SHMA found that the overall average household size in the Borough was 2.4 persons but that there were differences according to tenure as illustrated in figure 4.3 below.

Figure 4.3 – Average number of people in household by tenure

Analysis of household composition as illustrated in figure 4.4 emphasises the differences between each tenure. Of particular interest is the fact that 45% of households living in social housing are non pensioner single or couple households who, if living in accommodation with two or more bedrooms and claiming Housing Benefit, are likely to be affected by the underoccupation penalty as part of the forthcoming welfare reforms. It is also interesting to note the disproportionate amount of families with children, particularly lone parent households, living in the private rented sector where, as we have already seen, housing conditions tend to be the poorest.

Figure 4.4 – Household composition by tenure

Economic analysis

Deprivation

Halton is ranked 27th most deprived area out of 326 local authority areas according to the 2010 Indices of Multiple Deprivation. This has worsened slightly from a rank of 29th from the IMD 2007 although there has been little change in the deprivation score.

The most deprived ward in Halton is Windmill Hill, while the least deprived ward in Halton is Birchfield. 26% of Halton's population live in areas that fall in the top 10% most deprived nationally, this is more than the national figure (10%) but lower than the Liverpool City Region figure (31%).

The ward with the most improved average IMD score between 2007 and 2010 in Halton (therefore the largest decrease in deprivation) is Halton Lea. Halton Castle, Windmill Hill and Halton Lea have seen the largest improvements in the Barriers to Housing and Income domain. The wards with the highest ranking for Barriers to Housing domain are Beechwood, Daresbury and Heath which is presumably indicative of a lack of affordable housing, particularly in the first two areas.

Unemployment

Halton continues to have high levels of unemployment compared to regional and national rates. Latest figures show that 18.7% of the resident working age population claim out of work benefits, compared to 15% for the North West and 11.9% nationally (Feb 2012). Employment Support Allowance and Incapacity Benefit make up the largest proportion of these (10.3% of the working age population) followed by Job Seekers Allowance (5.8%).

12.2% of 18-24 year olds claim Job Seekers Allowance, a third of whom have been claiming for over 6 months.

Figure 4.5 below uses data from the SHMA to illustrate the economic status of the household reference person living within each tenure. As might be expected, the majority of housing owned without a mortgage is occupied by retired people and a third of social housing tenants are retired. The chart also shows the high proportions of unemployed people living in rented accommodation.

Figure 4.5 – Economic status of household reference person by tenure

Income

The SHMA used data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings for 2004 and 2009 to assess the median income of residents in full time employment. The results, illustrated in figure 4.6 below, show the gap between annual earnings of Halton residents and those living in the North West and Great Britain.

Figure 4.6 – Annual gross income of full time employed residents 2004 and 2009 – median income (SHMA)

More recent data from the Office for National Statistics allows us to compare the median weekly gross pay for full time workers in 2012 with neighbouring local authorities. The results, illustrated in figure 4.7 reveals the extent to which the Borough lags behind surrounding areas.

Figure 4.7 – Median weekly gross income 2012 (full time workers) (ONS)

Health and Housing

The links between health and housing are wide ranging and well documented. Improving housing conditions and the energy efficiency of housing can bring numerous health benefits as highlighted in the 2010 Marmot Review of Health Inequalities “Fair Society, Healthy Lives”. This study found that countries with more energy efficient housing have fewer excess winter deaths and that there is a strong relationship between cold housing and cardio vascular and respiratory disease. For example, it found that children living in cold homes are more than twice as likely to suffer from a variety of respiratory problems than children living in warm homes and that cold housing negatively affects children’s educational attainment, emotional well being and resilience to illnesses.

The relationship between health and housing is not just confined to the energy efficiency of housing. The removal of hazards in a property can help to reduce the number of accidents in the home, in turn removing the need for unnecessary hospital admissions and surgery and maintaining the independence of the occupier.

There are also links between housing and mental health. For example, fuel poverty, poor quality housing and overcrowding are associated with stress, anxiety, depression and poor mental health and studies have shown a relationship between insecurity of tenure and poor mental health.

Need for adaptations

The SHMA found that an estimated 15,104 households in Halton contained someone with a support need, representing 29% of all households in the Borough. People with a walking difficulty were the most predominant group, affecting 7,902 households (15% of all households) as shown in figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8 – Households containing someone with a support need

Respondents were asked to indicate whether there was a need for adaptations to their existing accommodation or a need for additional support services, with the results illustrated in figure 4.9 below. The results show requirements for a wide range of adaptations or support with help maintaining the home, provision of a level access shower and other bathroom/toilet alterations being

the most common. In the social rented sector the Council, working in partnership with Registered Providers, has been successful in clearing the backlog of requests for adaptations that had built up over a number of years. However there remains a level of need in the owner occupied and private rented stock although the figures shown in 4.8 below need to be treated with a degree of caution since they are based on survey respondents' assessment of need rather than an assessment by a qualified Occupational Therapist.

Figure 4.9 – Adaptations/support services needed

Demand for supported housing

The SHMA collected information about the moving intentions of households and, in particular, asked respondents who were seeking a move whether they would be seeking supported housing. The vast majority (over 90%) indicated that they would not, however, those that did anticipate moving to supported housing expressed a preference for sheltered housing with a warden, as indicated in figure 4.10.

Figure 4.10 – Demand for supported housing

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These figures must be viewed with some caution as whilst the postal survey did provide definitions of the different types of housing, the subtle differences may not have been fully understood. It is interesting to note, however, that demand for extra care accommodation evidenced through the SHMA, at 154, is significantly higher than that found by the last Housing Needs Survey undertaken in 2006, perhaps reflecting a growing awareness of this type of supported housing. This is not dissimilar to the estimate produced in 2008 by Tribal Consulting which looked at the potential demand for extra care based on care homes admissions and those in receipt of significant community care packages. The Tribal study estimated an immediate demand for 137 additional units of extra care, rising to 196 in 2017. The study was based on 2008 based population projections which have turned out to underestimate the numbers of older people in Halton compared to the 2011 based population forecasts.

Updating the population assumptions in the Tribal study produces a revised demand estimate of 199 units in 2011, rising to 272 in 2021, which reduce to 112 and 185 when existing extra care provision is netted off. Fuel Poverty

The current definition of fuel poverty deems that a household is in fuel poverty if it must spend more than 10% of its income on maintaining a satisfactory heating regime. Whether a household is in fuel poverty or not is determined by the interaction of a number of factors, notably:

- The energy efficiency of the property;
- The cost of energy;
- Household income;
- The size of the property relative to the number of adults in the household.

Latest figures from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (2010) suggest that approximately 18.1% of households in Halton are in fuel poverty, equating to 9,420 households. This proportion is lower than the regional figure but higher than national levels, as illustrated in figure 4.11, which also shows the steep rise in the proportions of households in fuel poverty from 2008 to 2009, equating to over 1,800 households. This is likely to be due to the impact of rising fuel costs at a time when income levels have remained static, or in some cases fallen. Current levels are likely to be higher still due to significant increases in fuel costs since 2009.

Figure 4.11 – Proportion of households in fuel poverty (DECC)

The geographical distribution of fuel poverty reveals that low value areas containing high proportions of private sector housing (e.g. Appleton, Ditton and parts of Heath, Kingsway and Mersey wards)

have higher levels of fuel poverty (between 25% and 35% of households). It is interesting to note that despite relatively lower income levels, levels of fuel poverty in the Runcorn New Town estates are not as high as might be expected. This is likely to be due to the relative age of the housing stock and the impact of improvement programmes to bring homes up to the Decent Homes Standard.

Space issues

Overcrowding

Findings from the Halton SHMA indicate that around 915 households (1.7% of all households) are classed as overcrowded using the bedroom standard (the most commonly accepted method of assessing overcrowding). Data from the Survey of English Housing (SEH) suggests that nationally levels of overcrowding stand at 3.0%.

There are a disproportionate number of households classed as overcrowded living in rented accommodation as shown in figure 4.12 below, where proportions exceed 3% of households in both social rented and private rented sectors compared to less than 1% of owner occupied accommodation.

Figure 4.12 – Number of households living in overcrowded accommodation

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Underoccupation

Figure 4.13 illustrates the number of people underoccupying their accommodation by at least one bedroom (using the bedroom standard) by tenure and by type of household. Underoccupancy levels are around 54% for owner occupied and social rented stock but are higher (62%) for households living in the private rented sector.

Figure 4.13 – Underoccupancy levels (by 1 or more bedrooms)

As might be expected, single person and couple households are more likely to underoccupy their accommodation, however, it is interesting to note that 5,679 non pensioner households underoccupy social rented accommodation. It is likely that a sizeable proportion of these households claim Housing Benefit and will, therefore, lose some of this benefit as a result of the underoccupancy penalty to be introduced in April 2013 as part of the Welfare Reform Act.

Impact of welfare reform

Part two of this evidence paper described the changes to Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance as a result of the Welfare Reform Act. Using information from the Council's Housing Benefit department and the SHMA it is possible to estimate the number of households who will be affected by the changes, as follows:

Change	Estimated number of households affected	Extent of impact
Introduction of Universal Credit	104 cases identified by HB as to be potentially "capped"	Total payments capped at £26,000 – loss of income for some households very significant (as much as £500 per week) Housing Benefit is first to be capped Payments made direct to claimant – possible increase in rent arrears and homelessness. Monthly payments could cause budgeting issues for households
Replacement of Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Payment (PIP)	It is estimated that 10,600 Halton residents claim DLA	The change to PIP will involve a reduction in the numbers of those receiving financial assistance. Claimants could be put off by face to face interview. Those receiving low rate care element unlikely to qualify. Losing DLA will result in loss of disability premiums awarded as part of other benefits.

Replacement of Incapacity Benefit with Employment Support Allowance	Exact numbers are unknown but Halton has a disproportionate amount of people claiming Incapacity Benefit	ESA is designed to reduce the number of people who are classified as unable to work. A large proportion of appeals to date have been successful, however, there is a very long wait for appeals (up to 12 months)
Extension of the Single Room Rent Allowance to 35	234	£37.61 reduction in weekly LHA entitlement
Underoccupancy penalty	SHMA suggests this may affect: 2,311 under occupying by one bedroom, 725 under occupying by 2 bedrooms 92 under occupying by 3 bedrooms	Those under-occupying their social housing property by one-bedroom to lose 14% of their HB and those under-occupying by two or more bedrooms to lose 25%.

The figures above show the extent to which Halton's households are likely to be impacted by welfare reforms. The implications of these changes for some of Halton's households and for the organisations who support them are likely to be significant. The expected impacts include an increase in rent arrears as households struggle to balance household budgets which could, in turn, put pressure on landlords to take action in order to minimise a build up of arrears. Registered Providers in Halton have been pro active in engaging with tenants who are likely to be affected and in many cases have expanded their in house financial support services available to ensure that their tenants are fully prepared for the changes.

There are also potential impacts for Council services resulting from a potential increase in homelessness applications and need for temporary accommodation including Bed and Breakfast (the costs of which are considered on the next page) and in demand for welfare benefits advice.

The impacts are likely to be further compounded by the localisation of Council Tax from April 2013 which will require some households who previously received 100% Council Tax benefit to make a contribution to accommodate a 10% reduction in Government funding and the transfer of the Social Fund from Department for Work and Pensions to local Councils which will also reduce the amount of funding available for Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants. The scheme will also replace cash payments to claimants with alternative forms of payment e.g. vouchers.

Homelessness

Levels of homelessness

In common with other local authority areas, homelessness in Halton is on the increase. In 2011/12, 154 households applied to the authority as homeless compared to 78 for the whole of 2010/11. Of these 154 households, 64 were found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need compared to 37 in 2010/11. Almost half of those accepted as statutorily homeless in 2011/12 were single women with at least one child and 35% in this period were between the ages of 16 and 24. Generally only a small number of ethnic minority households apply as homeless (4 in 2011/12), however, this is in keeping with the low proportions of ethnic minorities living in Halton.

Trends

Figure 4.14 illustrates changes in levels of homelessness over the last 5 years. It shows how homelessness has increased in 2011/12 compared with the previous year but also how 2010/11 had seen a very significant decrease on the three years before that. Total applications in 2007/08 were over three times as high as the number of applications in 2010/11. This is almost entirely due to the success of the authority's preventative approach to homelessness which is described in more detail below.

Figure 4.14 – Homelessness trends

Reasons

Figure 4.15 below illustrates the reasons behind homelessness and how these have changed over time, largely as a result of the preventative work referred to above. In particular, the number of households made homeless as a result of parents or others no longer willing or able to accommodate has reduced by 87%. While there have also been decreases in homelessness for other reasons, it is worrying to note that the main reason for statutory homelessness is domestic violence affecting 15 households so far in 2011/12, however this could reflect the increased need for crisis intervention and less opportunity for preventative work.

The termination of assured shorthold tenancies is the second biggest reason for homelessness in 2011/12, the numbers having trebled on the previous year. These trends are perhaps indicative of the current economic climate and, possibly, the impact of impending welfare reform which could encourage private landlords to evict tenants who are claiming Housing Benefit in favour of those who are working.

Figure 4.15 – Reasons for homelessness

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Repossessions

Much work has been done over recent years to stem the rise in repossessions and the number of orders granted has decreased by 55% from a peak in 2008, as illustrated by figure 4.16. The number of repossession claims and orders in 2011 was lower than they were in the years leading up to economic downturn.

Figure 4.16 – Annual mortgage possession claims and orders made

The number of landlord possessions has also been in decline, as illustrated in figure 4.17 below. However, figures for 2011, reveal that the number of claims submitted and orders made has started to creep back up, which is consistent with the increase in homelessness caused by termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancies for the same period.

Figure 4.17 – Annual landlord possession claims and orders made

Costs of homelessness

According to figures released by the Department for Communities and Local Government the average cost to the local authority of statutory homelessness is £5,500 per household. This compares to an estimated cost of preventing homelessness of £500 per household as illustrated in the table below.

	What's involved	Approximate costs
Statutory homelessness	Single person presenting as homeless on the day would warrant a full homeless assessment consisting of; Housing Solutions Adviser time Temporary Accommodation Provision Homeless investigation – contacting relevant agencies etc. to clarify information submitted Homeless Decision If accepted, securing suitable accommodation to discharge homeless duty	£5,500
Prevention	Single person threatened with homelessness (ordered to leave within period of time)	£500

	Prevention assessment Prevention options offered to client – BGS, Prevention fund, Negotiation with parents / landlord to sustain tenancy.	
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The Council started to develop its preventative approach (examined in more detail below) in 2007/8. At that time the Council regularly temporarily placed homeless households in bed and breakfast accommodation to fulfil its interim duty to accommodate households while investigations were taking place. This practice has virtually ceased due to the wide range of prevention measures the authority now uses. As an example in April 2008 to August 2008 bed and breakfast costs to the authority were £133,252. Costs for the same period in 2012 were nil.

The costs associated with the various prevention options available are as follows:

Prevention option	Average cost
Bond Guarantee Fund	£500
Prevention fund (assists with deposits, minor repairs,rent arrears etc	Up to £500
G.I.F.T (Furniture incetive scheme for 18-25 year olds	£100
Discretionary Housing Benefit – HB payment to assist clients experiencing financial difficulties etc.	£10 to £25 per week for an agreed period of time
Mortgage Rescue Scheme – Assist tenants and homeowners to remain within their homes	Up to £3,000
No second night Out – Halton is one of the six sub regional authorities to sign up to the service to tackle rough sleeping.	Externally funded

Prevention

Figure 4.18 illustrates the authority's success at preventing homelessness and enabling potentially homeless people to remain in their current home as reported to the CLG as part of the local authority's P1E return. As shown the main measure used is crisis intervention in the form of emergency support which over the last three years has helped prevent homelessness for over 600 families.

Figure 4.18 - Homelessness prevention measures – household able to remain in current home

Figure 4.19 below details the prevention measures that have necessitated a move to alternative accommodation. It illustrates the success of the Bond Guarantee Scheme and the relationship the authority has developed with accredited private landlords in providing alternative accommodation for potentially homeless people. It also demonstrates the role that providers of supported housing schemes play in alleviating homelessness.

Figure 4.19 – Homelessness prevention measures – household assisted to obtain alternative accommodation

Rough sleeping

Halton participates in the annual Cheshire rough sleepers count. Despite rigorous searches of likely sleeping places, to date, no actual rough sleepers have been encountered on the night of the counts. This is not to say that rough sleeping does not occur in the Borough, merely that the annual snapshot has not uncovered a problem to date.

The Housing Needs of specific groups

Introduction

A model to assess the housing needs of specific client groups was developed by the now disestablished regional assembly (known latterly as 4NW). The specific accommodation based needs for each client group are illustrated in figure 4.20 below. The model points clearly to a substantial need for specialist accommodation for older people, particularly the frail elderly. However, the model should be treated as indicative only and not as a definitive statement of need. For example the Council's Accessible Homes Register provides detailed information on the number of disabled awaiting suitably adapted housing and the type of housing they need. This is shown at figure 4.21 below. The Council has responded to this identified need and at the time of writing plans to develop a 100 units of extra care housing in Halton are well advanced.

Other vulnerable groups identified as having unmet accommodation needs are single homeless people, people with mental health issues and those with drug and alcohol problems. There is also a need to review accommodation provision for adults with learning disabilities in terms of the suitability and accessibility of current provision and a need to develop a planned approach to moving to independent, supported accommodation for those living with ageing parents or in unsuitable housing.

Figure 4.20 – Accommodation based support needs

Figure 4.21 – Halton BC Accessible Homes Register (number of clients awaiting suitably adapted housing)

Gypsies and Travellers

Halton has two Council owned Gypsy and Traveller sites. The well-established Riverview site at Widnes has 23 permanent pitches, including a pitch for the resident warden. The site underwent substantial refurbishment in 2008. In 2009, the authority's first transit site was opened in Runcorn offering 14 pitches. There are also two authorised privately run sites, and a third site operating under a temporary planning permission. This gives a current total of approximately 56 pitches in Halton.

Under the Housing Act 2004 all Councils have a statutory duty to undertake periodic assessments of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Show People in their area. The last assessment, which was undertaken by University of Salford's Housing and Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) in 2007, was a sub regional assessment involving all Cheshire authorities and St Helens. It found a need for between 28 and 32 additional pitches in Halton, which equates to a third of the total need identified for the Cheshire Partnership area. The authority has gone some way to meet this need through the subsequent development of a transit site.

As well as the statutory duty to undertake periodic needs assessments, new Government Guidance in "Planning Policy for Traveller Sites" (DCLG: March 2012) requires local authorities to maintain a five year deliverable supply of residential pitches for Gypsies and Travellers sufficient to meet the identified need within their development plan documents. In preparation for this, the Cheshire Partnership plans to update its need assessment in 2013. The assessment will include travelling showperson sites.

The Homes and Communities Agency had recently awarded £850k to the Council to develop a further 12 pitch site which will make a significant contribution to meeting existing identified needs.

Older People

The SHMA provides further details on people over the state retirement age prevailing at the time the survey was completed. In particular, the study used demographic modelling to predict changes in the population of older people. It estimated an increase of 6,000 households made up solely of people of pensionable age between 2010 and 2026, increasing the proportion of older person households from 23% to 30% as illustrated in figure 4.22.

Figure 4.22 – Growth in older person households 2010 - 2026

Clearly, this increase will have significant implications for housing provision and related care and support services. The SHMA recommends that the local authority ensure that housing strategies and policies meet the needs of older people by:

- Ensuring that an appropriate percentage of new housing supply will meet the needs of older people and their carers in terms of size, location and design;
- Improving the condition of existing properties so that older people have homes which are warm and secure;
- Working with others to ensure flexible and tailored support for those who need it.

These issues will be addressed through the development of an Older Persons Commissioning Strategy planned for 2013. This will include services to older persons in Halton – including an older persons housing strategy.

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Part Four – Halton’s Services

Homelessness Services

Homelessness Prevention

The Council’s Housing Solutions Team deals with cases of statutory homelessness but the focus of its work is on preventing homelessness from occurring. A wide range of preventative services are offered, including:

Mediation

As already described family breakdown is a primary cause of homelessness, often arising from problems between parents and adult children. Therefore, Housing Solutions work closely with families to re-establish relationships and enable the young person to continue living in the family home where this is appropriate. In April 2011, Housing Solutions received Government funding to recruit a dedicated Young Persons Officer to deal specifically with 16 and 17 year olds and enable a more focussed effort on this kind of work. In 2010/11 the Officer dealt with 97 advice cases, preventing homelessness in 58 cases and in 2011/12 the Officer prevented 55 young people from becoming homeless from a total caseload of 75.

Supported Lodgings (Nightstop)

The Nightstop service has developed a supported lodgings scheme providing very short-term accommodation for young people together with a mediation service which aims to resolve issues which have led to the breakdown in family relationships. The accommodation is provided by a volunteer host family – a network of volunteer hosts have been recruited to ensure appropriate placements are available for young people, whilst more suitable short-term housing is found or until mediation leads to the young person returning to the family home.

Domestic Abuse Sanctuary Scheme

This scheme enables victims of domestic abuse to remain in their home by fitting enhanced security measures where it is safe to do so, is the victim’s choice and the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation. The sanctuary measures required are based on individual needs and include repaired, reinforced or replacement doors, hinges and windows, door and window lock and alarms and security lighting. The Council is currently working with partner agencies to develop a Halton Sanctuary Scheme with Registered Providers taking responsibility for the installation of sanctuary measures within their properties and the Council funding sanctuary measures within private sector properties. Halton also has a refuge for women fleeing domestic violence managed by Women’s Aid.

Bond Guarantee Scheme

In an effort to increase prevention of homelessness, a Rent Deposit Scheme was launched in 2007. The scheme was developed to assist homeless individuals and families to access private rented sector (PRS) accommodation by providing the deposit required by landlords. The scheme was very successful but costly so was changed in 2009 to become a Bond Guarantee Scheme (BGS). The scheme now provides the written promise of the deposit amount should it be required at the end of the tenancy. BGS allows the Council to assist more households into the PRS as no funds are released unless the landlord has reason to claim on the bond for rent arrears or property damage.

For each bond that is provided, there is a written agreement in place, which the tenant, landlord and Council all sign up to. It sets out what the bond can/cannot be used for and makes clients aware that they are responsible for the bond and will be invoiced for any reasonable claim, which ensures they are accountable for their own conduct during the tenancy. The agreement also details the importance of the client saving for their own deposit to eventually replace the need for the bond guarantee.

Of the 328 tenancies created since the introduction of the BGS in 2009, 67% are ongoing, 15% ended without a claim and 18% ended with the bond being claimed (either in part or in full). In the early days of the BGS the criteria was very loosely applied and nearly 100% of those who applied for a bond were granted one. Since this time the criteria has been tightened and therefore, the number of bonds granted has decreased. The decrease in Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates has also affected the scheme as it is now more difficult for households to find affordable accommodation in the private rented sector.

In 2010/11, 75% of claims on bonds were either partly or wholly due to rent arrears. In an effort to reduce this, changes to the scheme's processes were made. Applications for direct payment of housing benefit to the landlord were increased (since April 2011 72% of all BGS tenancies had direct payments secured) and greater restrictions were placed on the amount of shortfall clients were permitted.

Mortgage support

The current economic climate has led to an increased number of people finding themselves in mortgage difficulty. In response to this, Halton established a Repossessions Action Plan and Working Group to bring together the work of various agencies in the borough in preventing repossessions. Housing Solutions also has a dedicated Mortgage Rescue Adviser who since January 2010, has provided tailored advice to 187 households and as a result 94 cases were prevented from repossession.

Home Essentials Fund

The lack of furniture and essential equipment can make people reluctant to move from temporary accommodation and can contribute to abandonment of new tenancies. In Halton, this is particularly the case for younger people. In an effort to help towards the cost of setting up a new home, the Council has established a Home Essentials Fund, which those aged 16-25 can access if they have become unintentionally homeless and have been provided temporary accommodation in one of the borough's hostels. The Council will purchase items (up to a total value of £300) from a set list on behalf of the customer to help towards the costs of fully furnishing their new home when they move on.

Since June 2011, 10 young people moving on from hostel accommodation have been provided with essential home items, including microwaves, toasters, bedding and cookery items up to a total value of £300.

Tenancy sustainment

Housing Solutions advise or refer customers to other organisations for advice on a range of tenancy sustainment issues to ensure early intervention in the homelessness risk process. In the midst of the current economic climate, one of the key services is that of advice and assistance on debt, welfare rights and money management issues (which are provided in the most part by the Council's own Welfare Rights Service and the Citizens' Advice Bureau. In addition, individual Housing Associations offer services to their own tenants).

The Council's Welfare Rights Service acts as a buffer to homelessness presentations by providing both a preventive and reactive service. The team provides both welfare benefits and debt advice to a specialist level. In terms of debt provision, advice is given from basic debt negotiation through to attending court possession hearings. With regard to income maximisation, the team will carry out simple benefit checks, some form completion and, if people are wrongly refused benefits, assistance with reconsiderations and appeals is offered. Particularly with regard to disability benefits, benefit decisions are often incorrect and in the last financial year, 187 appeals were attended with an 84% success rate. The team also provides a specialist service, funded through MacMillan Cancer Support, to people suffering from Cancers and their immediate families and carers.

Service developments

Following an internal review of the Housing Solutions service undertaken late in 2011, the authority is currently changing the way it delivers homelessness services so that customers can now receive appropriate advice and assistance at the point of initial contact rather than having to wait for an appointment with a Housing Solutions Advisor.

No Second Night Out

Halton is participating in the Liverpool City Region No Second Night Out project. Utilising funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government, the project aims to ensure that by the end of 2012 no one will live on the streets of Liverpool City Region and no individual arriving on the streets for the first time will sleep out for more than one night. It plans to do this by providing a single contact point for reporting rough sleepers and developing a comprehensive menu of services for each local authority area so that tailored support can be offered to rough sleepers to assist them to come indoors. The service works directly with the Housing Solutions Service and external agencies to tackle and address rough sleeping.

Scrutiny review

Elected Members undertook a scrutiny review of Homelessness services in early 2012. The purpose of the review was to examine the provision of temporary accommodation in the Borough and review the extent to which it met housing need and provided value for money. There were a number of conclusions and recommendations arising from the review, the most significant of which was the need to rebalance provision of temporary accommodation for young, single homeless people across both sides of the Borough. This has resulted in the closure of the Runcorn based scheme Halton Goals. Plans to develop a 37 bedroom hostel on the Widnes side of the Borough by 2014 are underway.

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Allocations

Choice Based Lettings (CBL)

Choice Based Lettings is a relatively new approach to allocating property, which gives homeseekers greater control over the property they are offered as it requires them to express an interest in homes which are advertised locally.

Halton is a partner in Liverpool City Region's sub regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme, Property Pool Plus. The scheme, which went live in Summer 2012, includes five local authority areas and 22 Registered Providers across the City Region. A common allocations policy has been agreed which uses a banding system to prioritise applications for rehousing. Each local authority partner has selected a delivery agent who will manage allocations and maintain the CBL waiting list on their behalf. Halton Housing Trust has been selected as the delivery agent locally and transitional arrangements to move applicants for rehousing from the waiting lists of local Providers to the new IT system are well underway.

It is hoped that Choice Based Lettings will offer a more transparent and streamlined service to households seeking social housing. Support arrangements are in place for households who may experience difficulty in adapting to the new system and "bids" and allocations will be closely monitored to ensure that no one group of people is unfairly disadvantaged.

Private Sector Housing

Housing Renewal

Historically the Council has allocated significant resources to housing renewal in the form of grants and loans for vulnerable homeowners. Since the last Strategy was published in 2008 784 households have received financial assistance from the Council to help improve their homes at a total investment of £2.441 million. However in the current financial climate regrettably there are no longer funds available to finance this work although funding for Disabled Facilities Grants continues to be available.

Energy Efficiency

Introduction

For a number of years the Council has worked in partnership with Energy Projects Plus, a local environmental charity, to deliver energy advice and assistance to Halton residents. Until recently, this has included the management of two locally developed initiatives: the Energy Zone scheme, which provided discounts for insulation works and HEARTH, which provided emergency heating for people with heart and respiratory conditions and which complemented the Health through Warmth Scheme described below. Unfortunately, due to the loss of the Regional Housing Pot which funded these schemes, they were discontinued in April 2011. However, the authority continues to work with Energy Projects Plus to maximise the benefits of national and regional schemes for Halton residents and to capitalize on funding opportunities, as described below.

Warm Front

The Government's Warm Front scheme provides heating and insulation measures for vulnerable households living in energy inefficient dwellings. The scheme comes to an end later this year and will be replaced with the Green Deal described below. Through the Halton Healthy Homes Network, the Council is promoting the scheme to residents to ensure that those who are eligible benefit from the scheme before it comes to an end.

Green Deal

The Green Deal is essentially a framework which allows private companies to offer households energy efficiency improvements with no upfront costs, with the cost of the work recouped through savings in energy bills. The scheme, which is expected to be introduced in October 2012, could see firms such as B and Q or Marks and Spencer becoming Green Deal providers. Their role would be to offer a finance plan to the householder to pay the initial costs of the work which would be recommended by an accredited adviser and carried out by an accredited installer. The householder's contractual relationship, however, would be with the Green Deal Provider.

An essential element to Green Deal is that the expected financial savings are equal to or greater than the cost of the plan (this is known as The Golden Thread). It is, therefore, not suitable for all types of work or properties and, since, the plan is interest bearing, it may not be suitable for those on very low incomes.

However, the Council recognises the potential benefits of Green Deal for households who may not have qualified for means tested assistance and will work with Green Deal Providers and other organisations involved to promote the scheme. As an example, Halton has recently been awarded funding through the Government's City Deal programme to undertake energy efficiency improvements to two properties to act as Green Deal demonstrator projects through regular monitoring of energy savings resulting from the work.

Energy Company Obligation

The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) will replace the existing Community Energy Savings Programme (CESP) and Carbon Emission Reduction Target (CERT) managed by energy companies in 2013.

Unlike the Green Deal, which requires households to pay for the measures over time, ECO places an obligation on gas and electricity suppliers to achieve energy savings through a smaller range of measures and expects them to subsidise or fully meet the cost of these measures. There are three elements to ECO which have different eligibility criteria as outlined below.

ECO Carbon Saving

This element of ECO is a grant available to any household requiring solid wall insulation or cavity wall insulation that requires additional work to allow the insulation to be installed (“hard to treat cavity wall insulation”). The grant amount will vary across different suppliers but is expected to be mixed together with Green Deal finance to meet the total cost of the work. Other measures such as glazing, draughtproofing or replacement external doors can be added to the improvement package and may attract additional grant from the supplier.

ECO Affordable Warmth

This element of ECO is a grant available to private sector households in receipt of qualifying benefits. Measures eligible for the grant include loft and cavity wall insulation, insulation for solid walls and rooms in the roof, replacement glazing, new and replacement heating systems and renewable energy heating measures. The government plans to extend the current data sharing agreement between benefits agencies and utilities to enable eligible households to be targeted directly to encourage take up.

ECO Carbon Saving Communities (CSCO)

This element of ECO is a grant, aimed at reducing fuel poverty, that is available to any household within designated low income areas (those lower layer super output areas, LSOAs, identified as the lowest ranked 15% within the Indices of Multiple Deprivation). Halton has 33 such areas within its boundaries. To tackle rural fuel poverty CSCO can also be offered to households in receipt of qualifying benefits who live in rural communities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. Measures included in CSCO include loft and cavity wall insulation, insulation for solid walls and rooms in the roof, replacement glazing, new and replacement heating systems and draughtproofing.

Health through Warmth

The Health Through Warmth (HTW) scheme was set up by npower in 2000 in partnership with the NHS and National Energy Action (NEA). HTW operates through a locally based referral partnership which seeks to help vulnerable people whose health is adversely affected by cold, damp living conditions. This is achieved by facilitating the installation of appropriate energy efficiency and heating measures, along with the provision of related advice and information.

Clients are referred by health and other key community workers who have attended locally based awareness sessions offered by HTW. HTW Merseyside (including Halton), delivered by Energy Projects Plus, commenced in late 2003 and to date has received over 4,800 referrals and secured over £4m in third party funding in addition to over £0.5m from npower’s crisis fund. Key partners are the health sector, local authorities, and community support frontline staff who attend an awareness session and refer into the HTW scheme. Over 1,000 frontline staff have attended awareness sessions, though not all have made referrals into the referral system.

Warm Homes, Healthy People

Halton Borough Council was awarded funding under the Department of Health’s Warmer Homes, Healthy People programme to support vulnerable residents through the winter of 2011/12. The funding enabled two energy efficiency programmes to be offered to residents. The Emergency Heat Scheme provided emergency heating systems and repairs for residents and the Heat Aware scheme enabled tailored advice on reading meters and understanding heating controls and energy bills to be delivered within resident’s homes. The funding was also used to establish and launch the Halton Healthy Homes Network described below.

Halton Healthy Homes Network

The Halton Healthy Homes Network was officially launched at an event held on Wednesday 22nd February 2012 at Stobart Stadium, Widnes. The event was a great success and the Network now boasts 80 members from a number of different organisations including the council and many of its partners in the statutory and voluntary sectors and community groups. The aim of the Network is to increase awareness of the health implications of poor housing and fuel poverty so that front line staff from the council and partner organisations and community advocates are able to identify those at risk and signpost them to organisations who can offer appropriate assistance.

Membership is open to anyone with an interest in tackling poor housing conditions and reducing levels of fuel poverty in Halton – frontline staff, managers, elected members and community

representatives are all encouraged to join. The network is virtual and communication is mostly sustained via email. It is intended that the Network will continue to develop and in time become the main communication source and delivery vehicle for partnership working relating to housing conditions and fuel poverty. Initially it will have a key role to play in ensuring that relevant front line staff and community advocates are fully aware of the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation.

Affordable Warmth Strategy

Halton's Affordable Warmth Strategy was developed in 2010 with the assistance of National Energy Action and Energy Projects Plus. A wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations were also involved in the development of the Strategy. The Strategy has five main aims:

- To raise awareness and understanding of fuel poverty;
- Establish effective referral systems amongst agencies in Halton;
- Improve the housing stock so that it is affordably warm;
- Maximise incomes and improve access to affordable fuel;
- Ensure co-ordination and monitoring of the Strategy.

Steady progress has been made in implementing the Strategy's Action Plan including providing fuel poverty training to front line staff, developing an e-learning training programme and introduction of web based information for householders. The development of the Halton Healthy Homes Network will, it is hoped, enable further progress to be made, particularly in relation to establishing referral systems, however, other aims e.g. improving the housing stock remain more of a challenge due to funding constraints.

Merseyside REECH scheme

Halton has been allocated European Regional Development Funding as part of the Merseyside REECH (Renewables and Energy Efficiency in Community Housing). This will enable external insulation/cladding to be installed at over 60 socially rented properties on the Castlefields estate in Runcorn. A key focus of the scheme is to develop the skills of local people to undertake such retrofit work.

In addition to the REECH scheme Registered Providers have accessed funding under the Community Energy Savings Project to deliver energy efficiency improvements to housing stock in Halton Brook, Grangeway and Ditton and Halton Housing Trust has developed renewable heating schemes in some of their properties in Runcorn. The Council is working with Providers to explore and maximise opportunities presented by the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation.

Adaptations

Home Improvement Agency

The Halton Home Improvement Agency assists households whose homes are being adapted with the help of a Disabled Facilities Grant with a wide range of services, including:

- Providing a list of reputable local builders;
- Giving advice about housing options and conditions;
- Drawing up plans for the adaptation work;
- Liaising with contractors and others involved in carrying out and inspecting the work;
- Help to obtain other support services.

Registered Provider protocol

Historically tenants of social housing have had to wait longer for major housing adaptations from their landlord due to funding constraints. Recognising this inequality, the Council and Registered Providers reached an agreement in 2008 whereby the Council would provide additional financial help Providers to increase the number of tenants benefitting, and to reduce waiting times. A match funding approach was agreed with the Council paying 50% of the cost of the eligible adaptation work.

To encourage ease of participation by Providers the scheme has some flexibility and in particular the agreement offers two routes of organising and delivering the adaptations, either through the Provider or through the Council's Home Improvement Service. In the first two years the scheme has been

running, over 200 properties have been adapted, and the Council plans to maintain this progress for the foreseeable future, albeit with reduced funding levels. In 2011/12, the fourth year of operation, twelve Providers had signed up to the joint funding agreement and those that have declined to date hold very little housing stock within the Borough meaning that the majority of social housing tenants in Halton requiring major adaptations should benefit from this funding. The agreements with Providers are due for renewal in April 2012 and it is the intention of the Council to renew these agreements, subject to the availability of resources.

Accessible Housing Service

The Accessible Housing Service aims to provide a link between the Council's Home Improvement & Independent Living Services and housing providers. It works in partnership with all Providers with stock in Halton to enable a better match for disabled applicants to accessible and adapted homes when they become available in the borough. This means that individuals do not have the disruption of adaptations being completed and at a time of increasing financial pressures nationally it is a better use of Council and Registered Provider resources. Disabled applicants of any age from all property tenures are assessed when they have applied for housing to any of the providers, and available void adapted properties are also assessed to try and match applicants to the accommodation best suited to their needs. It is intended that the service will eventually be integrated with the IT system for the sub regional Choice Based Lettings scheme.

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Anti Social Behaviour

Halton's Community Safety Team responds to complaints of anti social behaviour and takes action against perpetrators where appropriate. They also work closely with Registered Providers of social housing to take an estate based approach to the issue. This approach as well as the introduction of a number of support services for young people has led to significant reductions in the number of incidents in recent years, particularly those perpetrated by young people. For example, in 2011/12 the total number of incidents fell by 12.43% on the previous year's figure while youth anti social behaviour fell by 19.6% in the same period. There has been a corresponding reduction in residents' perceptions that anti social behaviour is a problem as evidenced by a residents survey undertaken in October 2011. Whilst partnership working with Registered Providers and agencies like the Police have reduced anti social behaviour, the Council is not complacent and continues to work to reduce anti social behaviour across Halton.

Supported Housing

In recent years the Council has undergone a process of rationalising services to create efficiencies. This has involved ongoing reviews of service provision in line with the available budget to ensure that resources are focused on those most in need. Current priorities within Halton are the provision of appropriate supported housing for older people, people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties.

Partnership working

The Council has a strong track record of partnership working, both at a multi disciplinary level (through the Halton Strategic Partnership Board) and at a single issue, multi agency level. Examples of successful partnership working on housing issues include the following.

Halton Housing Partnership

Halton's Housing Partnership meets on a bi monthly basis and discusses a wide range of housing and related issues. The meetings are regularly attended by representatives of Providers with the largest stockholdings in Halton as well as a range of Council Officers with an interest in housing and the relevant Executive Board Members. The group is represented on the Halton Strategic Partnership Board to ensure a two way flow of information between the two groups. Recent and current issues

being taken forward by the group include financial inclusion, the impact of welfare reform, particularly as a result of the underoccupation penalty and development of the Tenancy Strategy.

Strategic Housing Visioning Group

A review of the Halton Housing Partnership in Summer 2012 resulted in the formation of a new partnership between Halton Borough Council and Registered Providers to focus on high level, strategic issues, known as the Strategic Housing Visioning Group. The group has initially adopted three key themes to focus on:

- Housing and Economic Development
- Welfare Reform and Employment
- Health and Well Being

It is intended that the group will have a long term focus on contemporary and forthcoming developments affecting housing and will oversee the work of the more operationally focused Halton Housing Partnership.

Liverpool City Region (LCR) Housing and Spatial Planning Forum

As previously mentioned the LCR Housing and Spatial Planning Forum is a sub group of the Liverpool City Region Cabinet and advises the Cabinet on housing and spatial planning issues. The Forum, which is attended by the Portfolio Holder for Housing Strategy, meets on a bi monthly basis and was instrumental in the development of the Local Implementation Plan which will guide housing investment in the sub region and has also successfully delivered on joint projects related to empty homes, kickstarting stalled housing developments, energy efficiency for hard to treat properties and Choice Based Lettings.

Appendix One – related documents

Document	Contact
Affordable Housing SPD	Alasdair Cross alasdair.cross@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 7657
Affordable Warmth Strategy 2011-2015	Joanne Sutton joanne.sutton@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8750
Choice Based Lettings (Property Pool Plus) Allocation Policy	Steve Williams steve.williams@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8859
Core Strategy	Alasdair Cross alasdair.cross@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 7657
Corporate Plan 2011-2016	Lisa Driscoll Lisa.driscoll@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8012
Design of Residential Development SPD	Alasdair Cross alasdair.cross@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 7657
Housing and Support Strategy for Adults with Learning Difficulties	Liz Gladwyn liz.gladwyn@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8120
Homelessness Strategy 2009-2013 and Strategic Review of Homelessness in Halton 2008	Patricia Preston patricia.preston@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8581

Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England 2011	Available from www.gov.uk
Mid-Mersey Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2011 Local Authority Report for Halton Borough Council	Joanne Sutton joanne.sutton@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8750
Private Sector House Condition Survey 2009 Report	Joanne Sutton joanne.sutton@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8750
Scrutiny Review of Homelessness Services 2011/12 Report	Patricia Preston patricia.preston@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8581
Scrutiny Review of the Private Rented Sector 2012	Joanne Sutton joanne.sutton@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8750
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment	Alasdair Cross alasdair.cross@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 7657
Sustainable Community Strategy 2011-2026	Lisa Driscoll Lisa.driscoll@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8012
Tenancy Strategy	Joanne Sutton joanne.sutton@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 8750