
HOUSING STRATEGY ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Veronica Copeland
Adult Social Care and Housing Portfolio**

Responsible Director – Richard Alty, Director of Place

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To brief Cabinet on the Housing Strategy Annual Monitoring Report and seek Members' agreement of two new Priority Actions contained in the Action Plan. A copy of the document is attached at **Appendix 1**.

Summary

2. The Housing Strategy 2012-2017 was approved in July 2012 and contains a commitment to annually review and assess progress against the targets. This is the first Annual Monitoring Report for the Housing Strategy 2012-2017.
3. Overall, good progress has been made in the first year of implementing the Housing Strategy. In terms of the six Objectives, we have:
 - (a) Increased the supply and choice of housing
 - (b) Improved the sustainability of housing
 - (c) Improved conditions in the private sector
 - (d) Invested in the regeneration of key locations.
 - (e) Provided good quality advice to prevent crisis and ensure access to appropriate housing.
 - (f) Provided effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups.
4. Of course, more still needs to be done. However, with 51% of milestones achieved in the first year of a two year programme and a further 34% on schedule, we are on course to meeting our six Objectives.

5. The only area where we are falling short is in the provision of housing to meet local needs. The housing requirement for the last monitoring year was approximately 340 dwellings, whereas the number of dwellings built was 113 with another 14 created through sub-divisions and conversions. While, the forecasts for the number of new houses to be built this year are better (particularly with new sites at Lingfield Point, Central Park and former Feethams football ground) there is still likely to be a shortfall. This is not a problem unique to Darlington as most of the local authorities in the North East of England are experiencing the same problem. One positive though is the forecast number of affordable housing completions which, if achieved, will more than meet the target for this year and the shortfall for last year. Another positive was the 14.5% reduction in the number of empty properties from 1,813 last year to 1,550 this year.
6. As part of this monitoring exercise, 14 milestones (8%) have been deleted as no longer appropriate (a schedule of the deleted Actions is attached at Appendix 1). Two new Priority Actions, relating to older persons' accommodation (Priority Action 24) and the introduction of Universal Credit (Priority Action 21) have been added to the refreshed Action Plan. The financial implications of new Action 21 will be brought to Cabinet Members through the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. New Action 24 can be implemented by using existing resources within existing budgets.
7. The Report has been to Place Scrutiny Committee who endorsed the two new Priority Actions. Members on Scrutiny Committee expressed two particular concerns; one relating to the poor condition of some private rented accommodation and the incidence of anti-social behaviour of some tenants and, two, the problems associated with long-term empty properties. The Report will be considered by Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 5th November. Their views will be reported verbally to Cabinet.

Recommendation

8. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) Members note the first year's progress on implementing the Housing Strategy and
 - (b) Agree the revised Priority Action Plan, including two new Priority Actions relating to older persons' accommodation and the introduction of Universal Credit.

Reasons

9. The recommendations are supported in order to achieve the outcomes and outputs in relation to the delivery of new housing and improving the condition of existing housing.

Richard Alty, Director of Place

Background Papers
Darlington Housing Strategy 2012-2017

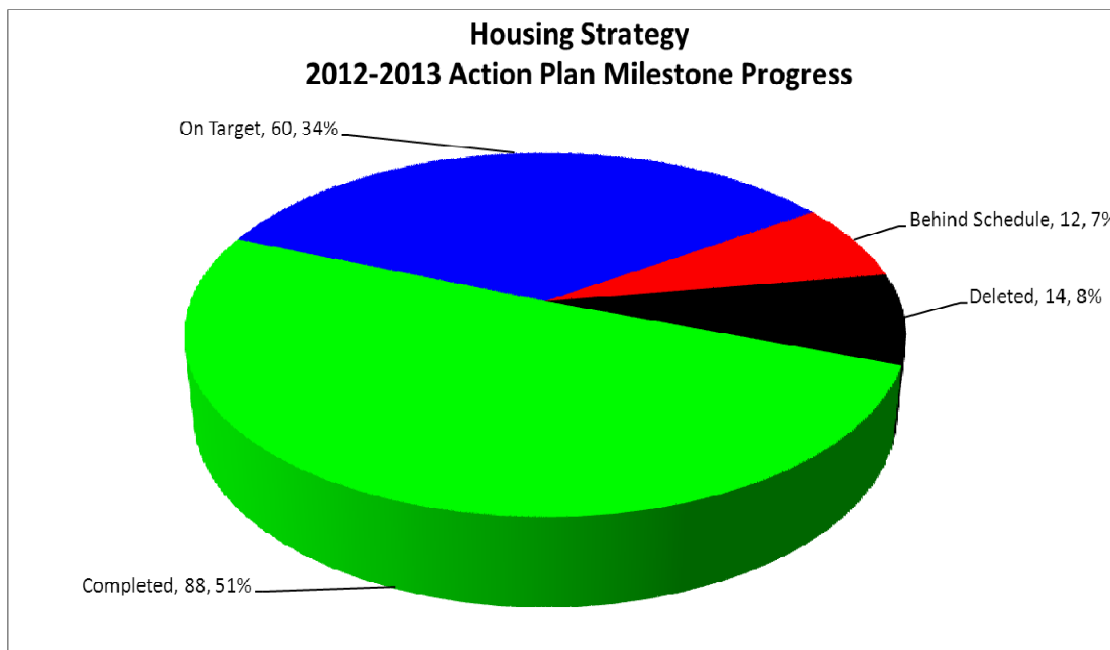
Bryan Huntley: Extension 2623

S17 Crime and Disorder	Empty properties can be a magnet for anti-social behaviour, arson and vandalism. Therefore, reducing the number of empty properties will have a positive impact on crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	It is universally acknowledged that good housing and good neighbourhoods have positive impacts on health & well being.
Carbon Impact	The delivery of energy efficiency measures through the Strategy will have a positive impact on domestic carbon emissions.
Diversity	No implications
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no implications on the budget framework.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The new Priority Actions support the vision and outcomes of the Darlington Partnership by seeking to make sure that everyone has access to affordable, decent housing that meets their individual and family needs.
Efficiency	No implications

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

10. The Housing Strategy 2012-2017 was approved in July 2012 and contains a commitment to annually review and assess progress against the targets. This is the first Annual Monitoring Report for the Housing Strategy 2012-2017.
11. The Strategy contains six clear objectives (below), to be achieved within the five years covered by the Strategy, through a rolling two year Action Plan:-
 - (a) Increase the supply and choice of housing to meet identified local needs.
 - (b) Improve the sustainability of housing.
 - (c) Improve conditions in the private sector.
 - (d) Invest in the regeneration of key locations.
 - (e) Provide good quality advice to prevent crisis and ensure access to appropriate housing.
 - (f) Provide effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups.
12. This Annual Monitoring Report describes the first year's progress on implementing the Action Plan with reference to the six Objectives and the identified Milestones.
13. As the pie chart shows good progress has been made, overall, to reach all the milestones within the two year Action Plan. After one year, 51% of the milestones have been met and a further 34% are on target. Only 12 milestones (7%) are behind schedule, while 14 milestones (8%) have been deleted as no longer appropriate. A schedule of the deleted Actions is attached to the end of this Report. Two new Priority Actions, relating to older persons' accommodation (Priority Action 24) and the introduction of Universal Credit (Priority Action 21) have been added to the refreshed Action Plan. The financial implications of new Action 21 will be brought to Cabinet Members through the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. New Action 24 can be implemented by using existing resources within existing budgets.



Is Objective 1 - Increase the supply of housing to meet the needs - being achieved?

14. While the vast majority of milestones have been reached, and new dwellings have been built, they have failed to achieve the supply of housing to meet requirements. The housing requirement for the last monitoring year was approximately 340 dwellings, whereas the number of dwellings built was 113 with another 14 created through sub-divisions and conversions. While, the forecasts for the number of new houses to be built this year are better (particularly with new sites at Lingfield Point, Central Park and the former Feethams football ground) there is still likely to be a shortfall. One positive though is the forecast number of affordable housing completions which, if achieved, will more than meet the target for this year and the shortfall for last year. Another positive was the 14.5% reduction in the number of empty properties from 1,813 last year to 1,550 this year.
15. While we need to do all we can to increase the number of completions, this is not a problem unique to Darlington. Most of the local authorities in the North East of England are experiencing the same problem. In Darlington, there is ample land suitable and available for residential development, but not enough first-time buyers willing or able to get onto the property ladder. It remains to be seen what impact the recently introduced Help to Buy Scheme has on the housing market.

Is Objective 2 - Improve the sustainability of housing – being achieved?

16. The Housing Improvement Programme was completed last year which delivered essential home improvements on the Council's housing stock. These improvements, which are above the Decent Homes Standard, will prolong the life of the dwellings and make them more energy efficient. In addition, "difficult to insulate" properties will be targeted in the Warm Up North Programme this year as part of several energy efficiency measures delivered through the Green Deal. The vast

majority of targets have either been reached or are on schedule. Therefore, Objective 2 is being achieved.

Is Objective 3 - Improve the conditions in the private housing sector – being achieved?

17. The standards of the Accredited Landlord Scheme are high and this ensures that tenants are living in good quality properties with good landlords. Last year's targets for expanding the Scheme have been exceeded which means conditions in the private sector have been improved. In addition, more inspections of unsafe properties have resulted in the removal of 101 Category 2 hazards, 141 homes returned to decency and 413 homes have been made free from health and safety hazards. Therefore, Objective 3 is being achieved.

Is Objective 4 - Invest in the regeneration of key locations – being achieved?

18. Very good progress has been made in all four regeneration areas (Central Park, Cockerton, Red Hall and Town Centre Fringe). At Central Park, the detailed planning application has been approved and the Development Agreement completed. At Cockerton, 77 dwellings have been demolished and environmental improvements to the Council stock have been completed i.e. built 31 hard-standing areas and paths; put new fences up at 32 homes; improved front walls at 30 homes; improved 67 roofs and, started work on rendering eight homes. At Red Hall, residents have been asked about their views and an options appraisal has been completed. In the Town Centre Fringe, potential housing sites have been identified and the Master Plan has been adopted. With only one target behind schedule, Objective 4 is being achieved.

Is Objective 5 - Provide good quality and timely advice to prevent crisis, increase choice and enable access – being achieved?

19. All Local Housing Allowance (LHA) changes which affected tenants privately renting have been completed. The Bedroom Tax which affected social housing tenants from April 2013 is still presenting challenges but all Council tenants affected were identified before the implementation date and home visits made where possible to provide advice and support. Discretionary Housing Payments have been made to tenants where appropriate and increasing numbers are opting to downsize. To date rent arrears are not causing any undue concern. A new Priority Action has been added to raise tenant awareness of the introduction of Universal Credit and to offer a Money Advice Service. All of the milestones have either been achieved or are on target which means that Objective 5 is being achieved.

Are we achieving Objective 6 - Provide effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups?

20. The Review of Sheltered Housing and Extra Care has been completed. A new Priority Action has been added which will provide a joint Planning and Housing position paper on accommodating older people. The vast majority of milestones have been achieved which means effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups is being provided. Therefore, Objective 6 is being achieved.

Conclusions

21. Overall, good progress has been made in the first year of implementing the Housing Strategy. Of course, more still needs to be done. However, with 51% of milestones achieved in the first year of a two year programme and a further 34% on schedule, the Strategy is on course to meeting the six Objectives.
22. The only area which is falling short is in the provision of housing to meet local needs. While efforts continue to try to increase the number of completions, this is not a problem unique to Darlington as most of the local authorities in the North East of England are experiencing the same problem. One positive though is the forecast number of affordable housing completions which, if achieved, will more than meet the target for this year and the shortfall for last year. Another positive was the 14.5% reduction in the number of empty properties from 1,813 last year to 1,550 this year.
23. A new Priority Action has been added to raise tenant awareness of the introduction of Universal Credit and to offer a Money Advice Service. The financial implications will be brought to Cabinet Members through the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. Another new Priority Action has been added which will provide a joint Planning and Housing position paper on accommodating older people. This Action can be implemented by using existing resources within existing budgets.

Appendix 1: Deleted Housing Strategy Actions

Housing Strategy Action	Objective 2 – Improve the sustainability of housing	
	Action 7 – Work in partnership to deliver energy efficiency measures as part of the Green Deal from 2013	
	Milestone	Comment
2.7.8	Review existing programmes and their impact	This action has been superseded by the Warm Up North Programme.
2.7.9	Develop future options assessment	This action has been superseded by the Warm Up North Programme.
2.7.10	An Energy Efficiency and Green Technology Plan has been approved	This action has been replaced with Green Deal Plans as part of the Warm Up North Programme.
Housing Strategy Action	Objective 2 – Improve the sustainability of housing	
	Action 8 - Publicise the free availability of water conservation measures	
	Milestone	
2.8.3	Water conservation promoted at Low Carbon event	This action has been superseded by the Warm Up North Programme.
2.8.4	Investigate what is on offer to residents.	This action has been superseded by the Warm Up North Programme.
2.8.5	Implement a programme of promotion of water saving devices/measures	This action has been superseded by the Warm Up North Programme.
Housing Strategy Action	Objective 2 – Improve the sustainability of housing	
	Action 9 - Ensure new housing meets sustainable building standards as set out in the Local Plan to be resilient to climate change	
	Milestone	Reason for Deletion
2.9.2	Host a developers' seminar to demonstrate Enplanner as a tool for completing Design and Access Statement requirements as part of planning applications.	The use of Enplanner was investigated and concluded that it did not represent value for money.

2.9.5	Implement Carbon Management Plan	This action has been deleted as the emphasis has changed towards mitigating climate change rather than reducing carbon emissions per se.
2.9.6	A reduction in NI186 figures for Domestic achieved	This action has been deleted as the national indicator has been dropped.
2.9.7	Making Places Accommodating Growth to include 20% renewable energy targets for strategic sites.	This action has been deleted as it is already in the Core Strategy
Housing Strategy Action	Objective 2 – Improve the sustainability of housing	
	Action 12 – Introduce enhanced role of tenants engagement	
	Milestone	Comment
2.12.5	Develop Tenant Inspection Team	Decision made not to implement Tenant Inspectors but to use the Mystery Shoppers in this role.
Housing Strategy Action	Objective 3 – Improve the conditions in the private housing sector	
	Action 15 – Reduce the number of non-decent homes	
	Milestone	Comment
3.15.5	Record the number of homes that are returned to the decent homes standard following a Safe Homes Loan from the Home Improvement Agency.	This action is obsolete as no funding available to support home loans via the Home Improvement Agency now.
Housing Strategy Action	Objective 3 – Improve the conditions in the private housing sector	
	Action 16 – Prepare and adopt a Private Rented Strategy	
	Milestone	Comment
3.16.2	Publish strategy for consultation prior to adoption	Consultation is no longer required.
3.16.3	Adopt Private Rented Strategy. Subject to approval from Cabinet if required.	Approval no longer required