



Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel

6th January 2010

Overview of Housing Services



Walsall Council



What's in store

- Short presentations
 - Strategic housing – what it is and why its so important
 - Who we are – the housing team
 - What we do – housing's contribution includes LA / private landlord interface
 - Facts 'n' stats
 - Challenges and opportunities
 - Questions



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Strategic Housing – what is it?

- A good strategic housing function contributes:
 - To the wider well-being of an area
 - To making a place where people want to live because it has good quality housing from which they can choose a type of tenure appropriate to their needs, aspirations and means
 - Helps to ensure that no communities are disadvantaged because of the housing they occupy or have available to them



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A good strategic housing function for councils:

- Is based on a vision for housing that is consistent with the areas broader place shaping ambitions
- Is well informed and understand local housing needs and markets
- Has effective housing partnerships and relationships
- Uses regulatory powers as well as influence; and
- Has skilled and competent staff



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So why is the strategic housing function so important?

- 1 – Funding and regulatory changes reinforce the need for WMBC to manage housing strategically
 - If WMBC does not have a local investment plan agreed with partners we will not secure funding and support from the HCA
 - CAA will assess how well housing is contributing to WMBC's and our partners' ambitions for the area
 - Although WMBC only directly commits a small proportion of the overall monies spent on housing in the area, we do need to influence markets and funding flows as well as deliver services



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2 - Managing our housing responsibilities can help us to create sustainable communities

- WMBC does not have its own stock but still has housing responsibilities that provide opportunities to improve the Borough
- Improving housing can improve public health and children's education, and make contributions to more sustainable communities
- Improving the housing stock that already exists will help more people than building new houses but more homes are also needed



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3 - Well targeted spending can yield financial benefits

- Every £1 spent on providing housing support for vulnerable people can save nearly £2 in reduced costs of health services, tenancy failure, crime and residential care
- Spending between £2,000 and £20,000 in adaptations that enable an elderly person to remain in their own home can save £6,000 per year in care costs
- If only 5% of empty homes could be brought back into use, council's nationally could cut their annual homelessness costs by £½ billion. How much for WMBC?



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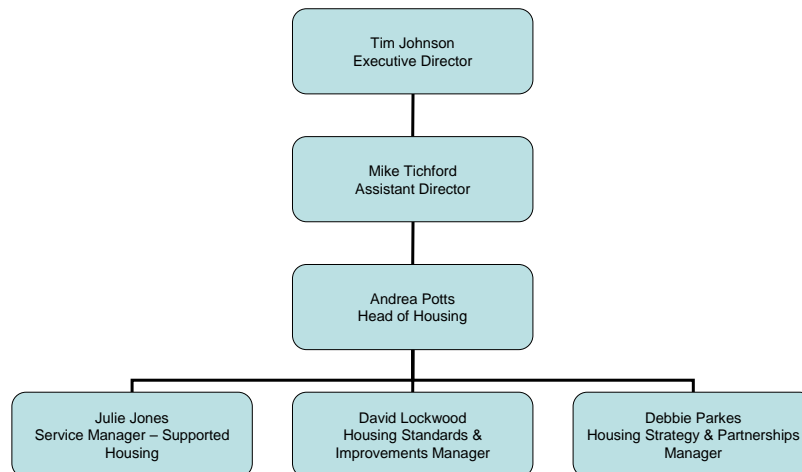
4 - WMBC's approach to housing delivery is improving local housing

- A clearly expressed housing strategy has made it easier to attract developers and funding
- Innovative partnership working to tackle homelessness and improve housing quality has delivered in ways that could not have been achieved alone
- Use of regulatory powers and accreditation schemes have improved the quality of housing without spending significant sums of money



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Who we are – the housing team



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What we do

Housing Strategy & Partnerships

- Assess and plan for current and future housing needs
- Make best use of existing housing stock
- Plan and facilitate new housing supply
- Work in partnership with funding agencies and housing developers to increase the number of affordable homes
- Increase access to housing
- Work in partnership to secure effective housing and neighbourhood management



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Our Priorities

Housing Strategy & Partnerships

- Increase access to housing via choice based lettings
- Increase the number of affordable homes in the borough
- Enable greater choice of property type across all tenures
- Reduce overcrowding



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What we do

Supported Housing

- Housing advice and housing options
- Homeless investigations
- Provision and management of temporary accommodation / supported housing projects
- Provision and management of services to the Gypsy & Traveller community
- Support services for refugees



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Our Priorities

Supported Housing

- Enhanced housing options
- Modernisation of TA
- Additional pitches for Gypsies & Travellers to meet the identified need
- Transition of NCO service
- Better take up and targeting of support services



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What we do

Housing Standards & Improvements

- Disabled facilities grants
- Loans & grants
 - statutory grants to discretionary loans
 - reinforcing owners responsibilities
- Houses in Multiple Occupation
 - 2,000 most vulnerable in 350 highest risk properties
 - Statutory licensing & enforcement
- Work with landlords & tenants
 - Homestamp
 - Landlord forum & accreditation



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Our Priorities

Housing Standards & Improvements

- Targeting support at the borough's most vulnerable residents and households including younger and first time private sector tenants
- Tackling:
 - Poor conditions in HMO accommodation
 - Fuel poverty and excess seasonal deaths
- Promoting independence and reducing social care costs
 - Disabled facility grants
 - Supporting take up of adapted housing transfers



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Spotlight – the Council's relationship with private sector landlords

Work with tenants and private landlords

- **HMO Work**
 - Partnership work with Fire Service to proactively tackle fire risks
 - Statutory licensing and enforcement for failures to licence and improve
- **Tackling illegal evictions**
 - Proactive – education of landlords and tenants
 - Improving tenant relations with landlords – significant reactive work following complaints
 - Reducing homelessness
 - Firm enforcement action against illegal evictions



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Spotlight – the Council's relationship with private sector landlords

- Key Homestamp partner – developing nationally recognised best practice on fires and security, landlords licensing and tenant advice
- Bi-annual Landlord Forum and newsletter to provide support, advice and information for landlords
- Landlord Accreditation Scheme – 1,000 landlords in West Midlands
- Key support for younger / first time tenants to aid them in choosing suitable accommodation. Wish to develop proactive support for care leavers etc
- Working with education specialists to develop a lesson plan on subject of setting up home



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Facts 'n' stats 2008/9

- Housing advice enquiries – 5,500 pa ↑
 - Homeless preventions ↑
 - Homeless acceptances ↓
 - TA usage ↓
- Investment – 1,476 homes delivered with an investment of £66.9M between 2006/11 ↑
- DFG enquiry list – 700 ↓
- Adaptations delivered – 250 ↓
- Private homes improved – 695 ↓
- Demand for social housing – 16,000 at March 09 ↑



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Challenges

- Impacts of the recession on housing delivery
 - Repossessions / negative equity
 - Unemployment / indebtedness
 - Housing market volatility
- Constraints on public spending
- Increased demand
 - Ageing population
 - Non-traditional customers
 - Larger social housing tenancies
 - 16 / 17 year olds
 - Gypsies & Travellers
- Aligning services to those in greatest need



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Questions?



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