

Council – 9th January 2012

Walsall Housing Strategy 2011 - 2016

Service: Housing Service

Wards: All

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Housing Strategy 2011 – 16 (Delivering new and improved homes for the people of Walsall) details our housing priorities for the next five years, and how we intend to achieve them.
- 1.2 The draft strategy was presented to Council on the 7th November 2011 and was not adopted.
- 1.3 Members commented that the strategy needed to be more closely linked to delivery, that the impact of the government's welfare reforms needed to be more robustly made and that issues around energy efficiency and new build housing needed to be addressed to help people tackle the issue of fuel poverty.
- 1.4 These comments were discussed in detail at Regeneration Scrutiny panel on the 5th December 2011 and Scrutiny Members requested the following changes.
 - (a) Increasing the availability of social housing;
 - (b) A focus on creating more sustainable homes, particularly in terms of more efficient construction methods and energy efficiency
 - (c) The need to invest in land remediation in order to instigate future housing developments;
 - (d) Plans on how void properties can be brought back into use;
 - (e) Each priority and action area should have an action plan at the end of each chapter detailing how the strategic priorities will be delivered and effectively monitored;
- 1.5 The changes have been incorporated into the document and the revised draft strategy circulated to all councillors for further comment prior to representation at Council.

2. Recommendations

That Council adopt the Housing Strategy 2011 – 2016 set out in the **Appendix**.

Background papers

Cabinet Report 14 September 2011
Draft Walsall Housing Strategy 2011 – 2016

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22 December 2011

Housing Strategy 2011-2016

Draft August 2011

**Delivering new and improved homes
for the people of Walsall**

Foreword

Walsall Council welcomes the opportunity to present our latest Housing Strategy 2011-16

Walsall Council is responsible for the preparation of a Housing Strategy which assesses housing needs in the area, across all tenures. It is a planning document which sets out how we will tackle the various housing issues within Walsall, the resources that are needed and, the time in which the various tasks need to be completed. The Council is committed to meeting the needs and aspirations of the people within the borough, by providing an environment for strong housing growth, as well as making the access to good quality housing fairer and more flexible. The Strategy has been developed following extensive consultation and engagement, ensuring clarity about housing priorities and how we will deliver them.

The Strategy also takes into account the current difficult economic environment and has investigated new ways to do things in order to maximise results. This Housing Strategy can make a difference to the local economy by maximising jobs in the construction industry, supporting trades people and suppliers, enabling new housing related businesses, and increasing the number of local trainees and apprenticeships. This strategy strengthens the links between housing and employment and is looking to the low carbon economy to drive through new provision, increased skills and market leadership.

It will act as the basis for discussion about how to do things differently to get better results with the Homes and Communities Agency, with our housing associations and with other key partners in terms of delivery of the strategic housing priorities.

Housing plays a significant role in the lives of everyone. The quality of our housing, how much it costs and where people live continue to be some of the biggest influences on people's quality of life. Good quality homes play an essential part in economic growth, educational attainment, public health and community cohesion.

The underlying ambition of this strategy is to turn the challenges we face into opportunities not only to ensure that we deliver value for money housing services and better quality life outcomes for residents but also that we can continue to help improve and grow the borough's economy. We are confident that together we can make a difference on all fronts.

We thank all who have contributed to the Strategy and their commitment to work with us, turning the housing challenges of improving the quality and energy efficiency of our homes, addressing fuel poverty, providing more affordable homes and bringing empty homes into use, into opportunities for the future.

We look forward to working with you all in the coming years to implement this Strategy to make Walsall an even better place.



Tim Johnson
Executive Director
Regeneration Services



Councillor Adrian Andrew
Cabinet Portfolio
Regeneration Services

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Achievements

The previous Housing Strategy successfully generated a number of achievements over the last three years. The current Strategy aims to build on this success and make connections to the current challenges facing our residents such as economic prosperity, educational attainment, and health and community sustainability.

Our key achievements since the last strategy include:

- £16 million of housing grant and loan work completed on 2072 homes
- 372 major Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) delivered
- 1,121 private sector homes made free of category 1 hazards
- Developed and delivered the 1st Community Energy Saving Project (CESP) in the UK which helped 149 Whg and 152 private families with an investment of approximately £3.1 million
- Enabled £50 million of Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) grant for approximately 1000 affordable homes which includes Waterfront South. This provided 158 homes, including homes for key workers (doctors and nurses) and contributed to the overall place making agenda.
- Provided housing related support to 616 vulnerable households in the borough
- £455,000 saved in ensuring homeless household are re-housed through the nomination agreement reducing bed and breakfast costs (estimated at 10 families of 5 nights)
- Prevented 900 households from becoming homeless in 2010/11
- 222 repossessions prevented via provision of court desk facility
- 83 severely overcrowded households and 126 under occupied households re housed, through partnership working.

To ensure a consistent and comprehensive strategic approach to housing, we have successfully merged a number of our housing related strategies such as our Homelessness, Black Minority Ethnic and Private Sector strategies into this document.

Vision and Priorities

The Council Purpose is to:-

'Maintain and improve the physical and economic environment for the health and wellbeing of our residents within financial constraints and to operate efficiently and collaborating within a one Council model and with partners to ensure value for money for tax payers and their funders'

Whilst working to this purpose the Council is committed to the following priorities

- Health and Wellbeing
- Communities and Neighbourhoods
- Economy

The Regeneration Directorate's purpose is to 'create the conditions for sustained economic recovery and growth'.

Based on our achievements and evolving housing markets the Council has reviewed its housing vision and priorities from its previous Housing Strategy 2008-2011.

Our revised vision and priorities are a result of; consultation with residents and partner agencies, an analysis of our local housing need, and changes in national and regional policy.

Our Housing Vision is to:

'Ensure access to a choice of sustainable, quality homes that meet the needs of our communities'.

Our strategic housing priorities are to:

- Increase housing choice and employment opportunities
- Tackling fuel poverty and improving the quality and energy efficiency of existing and future homes,
- Address different needs and promote independent living, health and well-being

We want to:

- Create and maintain neighbourhoods where people want to live and work in
- Work to lessen the impact of welfare benefit changes.
- Work with partners to support good neighbourhood management models
- Improve the condition, quality, energy efficiency and choice of housing in Walsall and contribute to the social and economic well being of the borough helping to deliver sustainable communities and reduce fuel poverty.
- Support economic growth and help reduce worklessness
- Provide greater housing choice to meet a wide variety of needs including the needs of our ageing population, those with disabilities and new and emerging communities,
- Ensure there is a wide range of support options available to meet the needs of vulnerable people to help them manage their home and live independently for longer.
- Maximise investment in priority areas, particularly in a period of constrained resources, to support economic growth and reduce worklessness

Strategic Links

National Context

There have been dramatic changes in national and international factors affecting housing since the previous version of this Strategy was prepared in 2008:

1. Several years of economic growth were largely caused by excessive lending to fund housing. This lending led to high house prices that made private owner-occupation housing unaffordable for many.
2. This lending proved to be unsustainable. The subsequent 'credit crunch' led to the recession, which has resulted in loss of output and employment.
3. The downturn in the housing market has caused a lack of confidence in new build housing investment
4. The reduction in the willingness of lending institutions to provide funding has affected both developers and those wanting to access mortgages (especially for first time-buyers).
5. Unrest in oil producing countries has led to significant rises in the cost of living, with the Consumer Prices Index being 1.5 in April 2005 and 4.5 in April 2011.

Within this context, the new Government that took office in May 2010 has set a number of priorities. These include increasing housing supply and providing more homes that people want in the places where they want them. At the same time, the significantly reduced availability of public finance for both housing and regeneration is requiring local authorities and others responsible for housing provision to find new ways of attracting more investment into housing and delivering better value for money.

The other key policy proposals that will affect this Housing strategy include

- Localism which seeks to empower local communities to have more say over their local area.
- Welfare Reform which seeks to cut the overall level of welfare benefit by capping Housing benefit and moving towards universal credit.
- Changes to social housing which include the replacement of grant funding for social housing with an affordable housing scheme, new products such as affordable rents and greater letting flexibility

The Localism Act proposes devolving greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and gives local communities more control over housing and planning decisions.

The Housing and Planning provisions will:

- Abolish Regional Strategies that currently set new housing numbers at a regional level. The numbers would instead be set by individual local planning authorities, based on an assessment of housing need in their areas.
- Amend the Community Infrastructure Level (CIL) which allows councils to charge developers to pay for infrastructure.
- Provide for Neighbourhood Plans which would allow neighbourhoods to prepare their own development plans in support of additional housing.

- Give local authorities the power to limit who can apply for social housing within their area and to discharge their duty to homeless people by using privately rented accommodation.
- Introduce flexible tenancies which will provide people with choice, quality and greater mobility.

The government launched 'Laying the foundations' A National Housing Strategy for England in November 2011. It explains the government's opinion of the role of housing in the wider economy and its contribution to social mobility.

The strategy presents ideas and initiatives on

- Increasing housing supply
- Social housing Reform
- The private rented sector
- Empty homes
- Housing support and quality
- Quality, sustainability and design.

The document also introduces new approaches and interventions, including

- A mortgage indemnity scheme for purchase of new build property
- Provision of development finance for stalled sites
- Further support for custom build (self-build) housing
- Reinvigorating Right to Buy
- Additional financial support to tackle empty homes

The significance of the strategy is that it recognises that housing is central to the country's economic success, and people's health and wellbeing. Walsall's housing strategy aims to provide a platform to make best use of these new funding mechanisms and interventions on offer, helping to meet the housing needs and aspiration of the people of Walsall.

Sub-regional context

The West Midlands lags behind the national average in terms of GDP per capita and the shortfall has grown steadily over the last fifteen years. The region is ranked only seventh among the nine English regions.

- The West Midlands is behind the UK average in terms of productivity and there has been some widening of this gap since 1989.
- Manufacturing remains very significant to the regional economy. Some of the productivity gap arises because the West Midlands has a distribution of activities skewed towards low added-value manufacturing.
- The West Midlands suffers from low investment in research and development and a low incidence of innovation, although this is less marked in manufacturing than in services.

- Skills levels are poor both in terms of formal qualifications and training. Unskilled workers have lower productivity rates, relative to the UK.

These structural features suggest that the West Midlands economy is relatively vulnerable to recession.¹ The declining employment in the region and the fall in wages in real terms are likely to have a significant effect on peoples ability to access and maintain accommodation.

Income levels are low and high levels of deprivation have had their impact on housing markets which are characterised by:

- Low-value private sector housing - with growing disparities between house prices in the area and regional averages. The primary characteristic of housing markets in the Black Country is the low-value of private housing across most of the conurbation - particularly in the core - with a general lack of higher value and aspirational housing apart from in fringe areas of the outer boroughs.
- A high proportion of social-rented housing - with the Black Country exhibiting some of the lowest levels of private ownership in the region - despite two decades of sales of council stock and clearance of unpopular stock.

The Council is a member of the Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group. The Group has a multi agency/cross authority membership and the purpose of the group is to take forward the key priorities in the Regional Homelessness Strategy. To ensure the implementation and delivery of the Strategy each sub region has developed an Action Plan.

We are a member of the Sustainable Housing Partnership which includes local authorities from the region and is supported by the Black Country Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (EEAC). It provides a forum for local authorities to share and develop best practice, develops joint funding bids and provides opportunities for joint working with private sector partners in the region to help address energy efficiency and fuel poverty issues.

Walsall Council chair Homestamp which is a partnership consortium with an interest in private sector housing. It comprises Local Authorities, Private Rented Sector, Universities, West Midlands Police and West Midlands Fire Service. Homestamp encourages the supply of good quality private rented homes, facilitates information and training for landlords and responds to regional and national issues affecting the private rented sector.

Walsall Council is part of the Black Country Consortium that seeks to ensure the four local authorities work effectively and provide direction and leadership on a range of issues. These have included the development of the Black Country Core Strategy and initiatives like the New Growth Points Housing Programme.

The Black Country

Walsall sits within the Black Country sub-region which includes Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Dudley councils. The councils work together to share good practice and identify any potential cross-authority working

The Black Country Core Strategy was adopted by the four authorities in February 2011. It carries forward the approach established through the work of the West Midlands Regional

¹ The impact of recession on housing in the West Midlands and the implications for policy. Nevin Leather Associates

Spatial Strategy to direct housing and other growth in the region to the Major Urban Areas, with major commercial development in the Black Country directed to the 'strategic centres' of Walsall, Brierley Hill, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton, and new housing concentrated on brownfield sites in a series of regeneration areas based around public transport corridors. The four local authorities aim to provide a minimum of 11,000 new affordable dwellings between 2006 and 2026, in partnership with developers and the Homes and Communities Agency. Walsall's housing target up to 2026 is to build an additional 11,973 new homes (net) across all tenures. This equates to 599 net new homes each year.

Walsall Council is a member of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The LEP consists of representatives from business, higher education, and the four local authorities. The LEP aims to deliver economic growth in the Black Country and enable private investment to improve the competitiveness of the Black Country, including;

- providing a voice and focus to drive exports and inward investment to lever private sector investment and employment;
- providing a single voice for the Black Country to define and agree public sector investment priorities with Government and provide a "bridge" between stakeholders in the Black Country and Government, driving sustainable, long term change;
- maintaining the shared integrated economic and spatial strategy to achieve those goals;
- prioritising and securing investments in key programmes to implement our shared strategy;
- promoting enterprise and innovation in partnership with the private sector for the benefit of our diverse communities ;
- coordinating delivery plans maximising the opportunities presented by publicly owned assets;
- securing innovative funding/development mechanisms to drive major change and investment
- preparing (jointly with the Integrated Transport Authority) an Integrated Transport Plan including acting as the nominated accountable body for the Black Country; and
- providing intelligence to monitor and evaluate our performance using the already established Black Country Performance Management Framework.

The objectives that will drive the Black Country LEP are:

- raising incomes to national levels enabling our businesses to become more competitive, modernise, diversify and up skill their workforce;
- growing the population of the Black Country with the economic growth that this brings;
- attracting and retaining balanced communities, and
- transforming our environment in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

Local Context

Walsall's Sustainable Communities Strategy requires the Council and its partners will work together to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of Walsall while

safeguarding the prospects of future generations². The Council will play an important role in developing the local economy, creating jobs and increasing prosperity, providing high quality affordable housing and Improving health and well-being.

The Council has six neighbourhood management areas which are the delivery mechanism for the Sustainable Communities Strategy. These areas are matched by Area partnerships that aim to:

- Engage with local communities to identify key priorities, which reflect resident concerns but which are also informed by data and intelligence and which complement borough-wide objectives.
- Equip and empower local communities to solve local problems. A key way to do this will be enabling local people and their representatives the opportunity to influence the allocation of public resources to ensure these are sensitive to local priorities.
- Ensure that the delivery of public services is co-ordinated resulting in better services for our communities and a more efficient use of resources.

The Council has produced a Local Economic Assessment (LEA) that has provided an understanding of the conditions required for business to work and for people to take advantage of economic opportunities. It will ensure that economic planning and regeneration are based on a sound understanding of the economic strengths and weaknesses of the area. Our Housing Strategy will help meet the infrastructure requirements which will enable people to work in the borough and have access to good quality homes.

Walsall Child Poverty Strategy (2008) highlights the need to promote employment and job opportunities for residents in Walsall. The strategy recognises the need to concentrate on the attainment of 0-5 year olds and their families in the most deprived areas and work with education partners to narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

Our Local Investment Plan (LIP) 2011-2015 explains how we will deliver a single strategic framework which includes our partner priorities and principles of investment. The LIP sets out our key investment areas and priorities which will contribute to creating a prosperous borough for our residents. Our Housing Strategy sets out how we will deliver elements of our LIP through enabling and facilitating key housing initiatives.

We will contribute to the health agenda by helping to reduce health inequalities by enhancing the health and quality of life of all Walsall citizens. The Health Inequality Strategy³ for the borough details interventions which will help ensure those living in the most deprived areas are given the opportunity to access the right services and increase their well-being.

The Council's Working Smarter initiative aims to change activity at the Council so citizens achieve better services which cost the Council less. This will help us deliver our services more effectively and help us react better to the needs and aspirations of our customers. We will embed the requirements of the Working Smarter principles which will help deliver quicker and more cost-effective services for all.

² Every place has its time and now its Walsall's time, Sustainable Communities Strategy, Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership. (2008)

³ Walsall Health Inequalities Strategy 2008-2012, Walsall Partnership

Chapter 1 – A Profile of Walsall

- In 2009 Walsall had a population of 255,900 people. The population has increased over recent years, reversing a period of decline throughout the 1990s⁴.
- Population projections show that the population will continue to increase over the next five years; numbers of dependent people will increase and numbers of people of working age will decrease⁵.
- 65% of households in Walsall are living in owner occupied accommodation, 27% rent from a housing association and the remaining 8% rent privately or live rent free. 32.3% of households include dependent children⁶.
- Walsall has a diverse range of communities living within the borough. People from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in 2001 accounted for 13.6% of the total population which is an increase of 4% since 1991. The Housing Needs Study Update 2010 showed BME groups account for a total of 34.0% of all housing need in Walsall.
- Employment levels in Walsall are considerably lower than the region and nationally, with less than two thirds of the working age population (63.2%) in employment in comparison to 68.5% in the West Midlands and 70.5% in England.
- In February 2010, nearly 35,000 residents in the borough were claiming benefits, accounting for over 20% of the working age population which is higher than figures nationally (15%)⁷.
- 77,158 people in the borough between 16 and 65 have no qualifications⁸.
- The 2008 Private Sector House Condition Survey found an estimated 10,200 dwellings (13%) in Walsall where fuel poverty was present. The private rented sector has, by a substantial margin, the highest rate of fuel poverty at 44% - (2,200) dwellings⁹.
- The Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix 2010 showed a total of 4,219 vacant dwellings of which 1,835 were vacant for over 6 months¹⁰.
- As at January 2011 there were 1,687 private sector dwellings which were empty for over 6 months. 251 properties have been empty for longer than 2 years and are distributed across the borough¹¹.
- The 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks Walsall as the 30th most deprived English local authority (out of 326); putting it in the 10% most deprived districts. This is a deterioration of Walsall's position from 2007 when it was in the 13% most deprived authorities, and 2004 when it was among the worst 15%. Deprivation is not evenly spread across the borough: Blakenall, Birchills Leamore, St Matthew's and Pleck are amongst the 10% most deprived areas of the country while parts of Streetly and Aldridge are in the 10% least deprived (see figure 1).

⁴ 2008-based Sub-national Population Projections, Office for National Statistics

⁵ 2008-based Sub-national Population Projections, Office for National Statistics

⁶ Source Census 2001.

⁷ **Local Economic Assessment: Overview Challenges and Opportunities for Walsall Draft Version 1 April 2011, Walsall council**

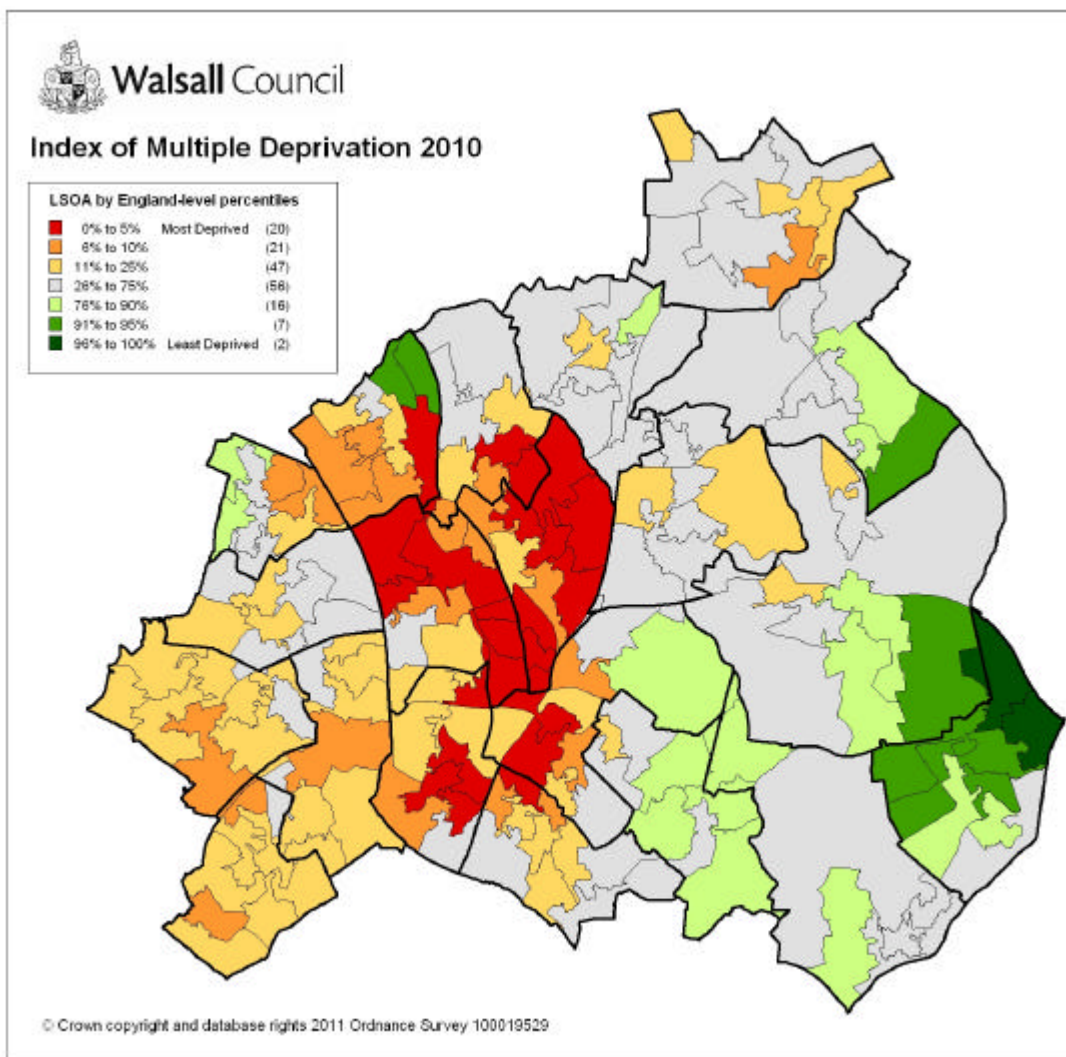
⁸ 2008 Annual Population Survey, Working-age resident qualifications, 2008 Office for National Statistics

⁹ Private Sector Stock Condition Survey, March 2008

¹⁰ Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix Walsall 2010

¹¹ Revenue and Benefits Data – Accessed January 2011

Figure 1: Index of multiple deprivation, 2010



Source: Department of Communities and Local Government

- 28% of children living in the borough in August 2008 were living in poverty which is higher than the national average of 21%. The distribution of child poverty shows Blakenall as the area with the highest proportion of children living in poverty (47%). The analysis showed Blakenall and Birchills Leamore as the wards with the children aged between 0-10 years at most risk of living in poverty as households with children are likely to contain parents who are not in work or in a lone parent household dependant on out of work benefits¹².
- People in these deprived areas live 8 years less than those in the least deprived wards.¹³
- The health of the people of Walsall continues to be worse than the England average.

¹² Walsall's Child Poverty Needs Assessment 2011, Walsall council

¹³ Health Profile Walsall 2010, Updated July 2010, NHS Walsall

- 40% of the borough population are considered as living in the most deprived areas of England.
- 15,238 households were on a social housing waiting list with the majority of people in need of 1 or 2 bedroom properties¹⁴. Of these over 10,465 are in the lowest priority band
- The total number of households accepted as homeless reduced from 2006/2007 to 2010/2011 by 55%. In line with this reduction the total number of families accepted as statutory homeless has reduced from 504 (2006/07) to 172 (2010/2011) equating to 0.67 per 1000 population.
- In 2010/2011, 938 households were prevented from being homeless by our work.
- Over the last 5 years the main reasons for homelessness have been the breakdown of relationships, parents no longer willing or able to accommodate, and loss or private sector assured short hold tenancy.

Housing Needs and Demand Study (HNS) 2010 Update

- There are two distinct housing markets in Walsall. The west of the borough borders traditional Black Country manufacturing areas with the M6 motorway a prominent feature. Traditional heavy industry, older housing and environmental scarring are more common. The east of the borough borders open countryside with affluent settled areas where there are extensive green spaces between neighbourhoods and much less industry.
- Land Registry data shows the average house price in Walsall in the second quarter of 2010 was £138,820, lower than both the national and regional average. The updated survey estimates that the average annual gross household income (including non-housing benefits) in Walsall is:
 - Mean average £25,410
 - Median £18,997
- The number of affordable properties required each year is 1,005. This is much higher than the figure of 305 required from the 2007 study. These 1,005 homes should provide a mixture of accommodation with a 19% intermediate rent (new build homes to rent at 80% (or less) of typical market rents, including shared ownership) and 81% social rent need.
- Overall, there are estimated to be 4,642 overcrowded households in Walsall (4.4%), and 36,017 (34.1%) under-occupied households (with two or more 'spare' bedrooms according to the bedroom standard).

The Local Economic Assessment

Walsall's economy has significantly under-performed the national and regional average over the past ten years. Between 1998-2008 total employment in Walsall fell by 2.5%, with full-time employment declining by 4.4% (just over 3,300 jobs) and male employment falling by 3.9% (2,200 jobs).

However, the feedback from the 2010 Business Survey of Companies operating in Walsall indicates a number of areas where there are opportunities:

- There is a high degree of innovation

¹⁴ Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix Walsall 2011

- Many companies already access national and international markets, and there is the potential to increase sales in these markets.
- A significant cohort of companies need or intend to move to larger premises and there is a strong commitment to staying in Walsall.

The main constraints are:

- Accessing new markets
- Obtaining finance
- The costs of training
- Skills gaps and skills shortages.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) January 2009

The JSNA process is a joint duty on Walsall Council and NHS Walsall under the Local Government and Public Involvement Health Act. The JSNA showed a strong association between deprivation, ill health, high levels of poverty, unemployment, and the quality of the housing stock (in particular, the private rented sector). The JSNA demonstrated a number of issues for the borough to take into account including: Social and Environmental Context, lifestyle and risk factors and burden of ill-health.

Chapter 2 – Increasing housing choice, employment and addressing welfare reforms

The Council aims to create and maintain neighbourhoods where people want to live and work. We are committed to providing the right homes, in the right places which are accessible. We will ensure that a wide range of housing types and tenures is available, which meet the diverse needs of our communities. We aim to:

- Address welfare reform
- Promote employment opportunities
- Promote housing choice and aspiration
- Increase the supply of new homes

Address Welfare Reforms

The government proposed that Welfare benefits for the unemployed and low paid should be brought together under a new universal credit system. The intention is that together with other benefit changes this new system would simplify the welfare system save money and ensure "work always pays".

The government believes that many people on benefits perceive the financial risks of moving into work as too great. For some groups the gains to work, particularly at low hours, are small, and any gain can easily be wiped out altogether by in-work costs such as transport.

The Coalition Government has identified two key problems with the current system:

- work incentives are poor, and
- the system is too complex.

The reforms to the benefit system aim to make it fairer, more affordable and better able to tackle poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency.

The main elements of the welfare benefit changes are:

- The introduction of Universal Credit to provide a single streamlined benefit that will ensure work always pays
- A stronger approach to reducing fraud and error with tougher penalties for the most serious offences
- Reforms to Disability Living Allowance, through the introduction of the Personal Independence Payment
- A new approach to Housing Benefit and improve incentives to work
- Reforming Employment and Support Allowance
- Changes to Child Support.

The welfare benefit reforms are however not without concern. Individuals and agencies such as Shelter are concerned that government plans to cut the £21 billion housing benefit bill risk driving thousands of vulnerable people from their homes and into poverty.

The benefit changes have an impact on many households within the borough.

Benefit Changes in Walsall

Date	Benefit	Change	Impact
January 2011	Health in pregnancy grant	Abolished	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3,674 families a year in Walsall will not receive this one off payment of £190. Part of a series of cuts involving families. Concern about the increase in debt for young families.
	Educational Maintenance Allowance	Abolished	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6,290 young people receive this grant. Concern that a percentage of these might leave education and training increasing unemployment.
April 2011	Child Benefit	Frozen for three years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern about increase in debt for young low income families.
	Tax Credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tax credit increased from 39% to 41% Eligible families will only be able to claim 70% of child care costs not 80% Earning disregard reduced from 25k to 10k 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This will mean less Tax Credits for low income families and workers. Concern about increased debt for low income households.
	Housing benefit (HB)	HB restricted to 4 bedroom rate regardless of size of property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 46 households currently renting 5 bedroom + accommodation have lost benefit of between 0.50p and £68.08 per week. Potential that private landlord could seek to evict if rent is not covered by HB.
	Housing benefit	£15 excess rule removed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,355 households who had between 0.55p and £15.00 extra per week have lost that money. Concern about increase in debt for those people using payment to supplement income.
		Increase in the charge for non dependants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2,245 households in Walsall will have to find between 0.55p and £ 12.85 per week for each adult living in their home. A major cause of rent arrears, family disputes and

			potential homelessness as non-dependents not always willing or asked to pay. Also increase in number of young adults looking for accommodation.
	Housing benefit	Local Housing Allowance rates set at 30 th percentile of local private rent prices not 50 th .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4,659 households in Walsall will lose housing benefit between £5 and £62.89 per week. Concern that the level of eviction / homelessness in the private rented sector could increase as rent is no longer covered by HB.
October 2011	Income Support (IS)	Lone parents with children over 5 will not be eligible for income support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially 3,705 Walsall lone parents will move from IS to job seekers allowance. On Job Seekers allowance, people are eligible for less benefits and if work is not found either paid or voluntary, they risk losing benefit.
	Winter Fuel payment	Returns to previous level of £200 and £300 from £300 and £400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Walsall 40,700 households receive this allowance. Potential increase in fuel poverty if there is a significantly harsh winter.
January 2012	Housing benefit	Local housing allowance single room restriction for people under 25 extended to people under 35 years for those renting in the private sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extends restriction for young people in private sector tenancies (exempt groups remain). Concern about increase in homelessness for under 35's, increase in debt as under 35's have to find shortfall of rent. In Walsall under 35's would only be eligible to £55 per week HB instead of £85 per week currently. Those exempt, rough sleepers, offenders at risk to public, those with high care needs and those formally in care under 22.
January 2013	Child Benefit	Withdrawn from higher tax rate families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The numbers are unknown but potentially will have an impact of those struggling

			with mortgage payments
April 2013	Disability Living Allowance (DLA)	Replaced by Personal Independence Payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3,406 Walsall residents will be on lower income. Potential increase in debt due to loss of income and increase cost of support services to those with a disability.
	Housing Benefit	Restricted to the number of rooms "needed" in social housing (already happens in private rented housing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For whg, the largest social landlord in the borough, there are potentially 4,892 tenants who are under occupying who will have to find at least £14 per week to make up the loss of housing benefit. That shortfall will need to be met by the resident.
October 2013	Universal Credit	Introduced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents will receive one payment paid directly. Concern that tenants would not pay the rental element to the landlord and that there would be an increase in rent arrears and eviction.

Data collected september 2011

Walsall's profile as an area of high ranking deprivation and a higher than average number of people of benefits will lead to any changes made to the benefit system having a disproportionate impact on residents of Walsall. The impact of welfare benefit changes is outlined above, and the council's priority will be to work with families to minimise the risk to their homes and well being. Working with residents to increase their employment opportunities is one avenue of minimising the risk of the reduction in welfare benefits.

Promote employment opportunities

Housing plays a key role in the Council's work in addressing worklessness and improving the life chances of our residents. We will work with housing association partners, voluntary sector and development partners where possible, to integrate opportunities which will improve the skill base and employment opportunities of people in Walsall.

The LEA has determined some key priorities for the economy and we will support and complement the work of the resultant economic Framework which will aim to:

- Develop a resilient mix of sectors, in which productivity and employment is maximised.
- Provide the necessary infrastructure to support a growing economy.
- Foster an environment that supports enterprise and innovation.
- Strengthen skills and knowledge that support economic growth.

- Promote financial inclusion and raising participation in the labour market.

The Darlaston JET (Jobs Education and Training) project in Walsall provides a multi-agency one stop shop centre for employment support, education advice and training. The JET supports the delivery of new employment opportunities.

Training and apprenticeships

Social housing providers are at the forefront of innovative methods of offering training and employment opportunities to local people supported by Walsall Council.

Whg's award winning skills centre provides training and apprenticeships opportunities to people in Walsall in a number of areas including plumbing and construction. The Centre will provide 50 apprenticeships per year over the next 5 years.

Walsall College is working to develop skills and training opportunities and the employer led demand has enabled apprenticeships, the development of a retrofit qualification and local enterprises

Bromford Housing is committed to creating learning opportunities for young people and has offered five apprenticeships in housing over the last twelve months.

Heantun has created 200 opportunities for employment for people with learning disabilities and ex-offenders.

Accord has built employment opportunities into tendering contracts which have created 37 jobs for local people.

Local developer Jessup Brothers created 10 apprenticeships / trainee opportunities as part of the Waterfront South development, some of which are still currently employed on Phase 2 of the site.

House Building

This Strategy aims to build on its previous successes through the Growth Point, HCA Kickstart, and Regional Housing Pot programmes to stimulate housing growth and kickstart stalled housing sites, This will bring construction led employment and training opportunities into the borough.

The Council via 'Think Walsall' is working with businesses and partners to promote supply chain and employment opportunities from the regeneration and procurement activity in Walsall. We aim to support Walsall based businesses and third sector organisations to link into major developers, public sector procurers and business.

The 'meet the Buyer' event hosted by Walsall Council led to links being made between developers such as Jessup's and local business which led to the local supply of aluminium windows. The contact led to the local firm attracting £1.5 million pounds of investment without which this local company would have had to make redundancies.

New Green Housing

The Council has worked in partnership with Accord Housing Association and secured a manufacturing unit which will produce timber framed houses. The key outcomes from the overall project are:

- Developing up to 20-30 jobs to include a proportion of local people,
- Potential for expansion of the business in Walsall,
- Potential to be national supplier,
- Potential to train local people to work at the facility

The provision of new timber framed housing in Walsall will provide an opportunity for properties to be built to a high environmental standard in an environmentally friendly way and result in an increase in new affordable housing for the borough.

The Council will continue to work to ensure this business is a success over the next 5 years, and aims to promote expansion of this type of environmentally sound production in Walsall

Retrofit

Housing partners and the Council are currently working with Walsall College to develop a mainstream retrofit qualification by March 2013. The qualifications will up-skill new and existing trades' people who will contribute to the retrofit employment market.

We aspire in future to work with Black Country and regional local councils and providers to bring in new retrofit supply manufacturing / assembly businesses which will provide local employment opportunities.

Six housing associations in the Midlands are considering jointly purchasing products and services to retrofit up to 135,000 homes. The M6 Group, which includes Accord, Bromford, Midlands Heart, Orbit, Walsall Housing Group and West Mercia Housing Group, will examine ways to make their homes 'greener'. The Group will be looking at ways of saving money which may include forming a procurement club to reduce the cost of retrofitting stock to level four of the Code for Sustainable Homes.

The Council has worked with whg via the CESP project to target hard to heat properties in whg stock and the private sector. Jointly we are at the forefront of Green Deal pilot 'Green Deal Go Early' in Walsall. Whg will set up a joint vehicle to be a green deal provider improving efficiency of stock through insulation, central heating.

Promote housing choice and aspiration

The focus of the Council and it's housing partners is to offer greater choice to individual households through choice based lettings arrangements and address issues in particular neighbourhoods through local lettings plans.

We are also seeking to manage our housing services towards an early intervention and prevention agenda to reduce the number of households entering rented housing in a 'crisis position'. The housing offer will be developed with other services such as health and

employment, whilst housing support is offered to individuals and families to achieve their wider aspirations and maintain their independence.

Walsall Council together with its housing association partners will be working to develop a Tenure Strategy by June 2012 to ensure that social housing is offered to those in greatest need whilst maintaining sustainable communities.

The strategy will include wider information on

- A local lettings plan
- Arrangements with housing providers
- Flexible tenures
- Advisory services
- Joint working arrangements: including common housing registers or common approaches to choice-based lettings by all social landlords in a given geographical area; common exclusion policies.

Access to Housing and Housing Need

Walsall Housing Group (whg) are the holders of the boroughwide housing register which currently has 15,000 applicants registered for re housing (as at June 2011). This includes approximately 250 households per year in the highest need due to homelessness¹⁵.

At present the Housing Associations in the borough operate separate housing registers. Work is continuing to create a simplified method of accessing social rented housing. The Councils Allocation Policy was reviewed in 2010 and whg's allocations policy now mirrors this.

To increase access to a decent home we aim to help residents look across the full range of housing tenures. It is envisaged that the Council will work to develop a mechanism where accredited private landlords are allowed to advertise their properties through a Choice Based Letting scheme. The revised system will be in place in 2012 and approximately 40 private landlords will be advertising their accredited property through the new system.

It is also important that the allocation of social housing is set within a wider enhanced housing options approach, so that people receive joined-up advice and information about all the options open to them across sectors, including private renting and low cost home ownership.

Under-occupancy

Under-occupancy in homes can be an issue for people living in them who usually are affected by fuel poverty and maintenance costs in particular if they are older people. It also has implications for housing associations, who can make better use of family housing and thereby reduce problems with over-crowding and homelessness.

We have an Under Occupation officer who will work with our housing association partners to identify under-occupancy and promote down-sizing and support people into smaller homes more suited to their needs.

This will make more homes available to those who are living in over-crowded conditions. We will also promote the changes in housing benefit to customers who are living in under-

¹⁵ Walsall Housing Group

occupied households, as vacant rooms will incur a greater financial contribution from householder.

We intend to help the release of 200 under occupied homes, and help 100 overcrowded households by March 2013 with the support of CLG funding.

Increase the supply of new homes

We want to increase the supply of good quality, well designed homes not only to address housing need but also attract new people into the borough. In the context of the difficult market conditions posed by economic recession and the housing market downturn there will be a need for innovative thinking to deliver the necessary numbers of new homes in the borough.

Due to the borough's industrial heritage a high proportion of sites are likely to have contamination to some degree. However, contamination isn't the only factor that can affect the cost of development: many brownfield sites are also affected by former mine workings (especially coal and limestone) and other ground stability issues. The cost of addressing these issues vary on a site by site basis and will depend on the proposed end use for example a residential site will incur higher costs than an industrial site.

Affordable Homes Programme

Between 2011-15, The Homes and Communities' Agency hope to invest £4.5bn nationally in affordable housing through the Affordable Homes Programme and existing commitments from the previous National Affordable Housing Programme. In Walsall, the majority of the homes built will be made available as Affordable Rent with some for affordable home ownership or supported housing.

In Walsall housing demand outstrips supply and we have 15,000 people on a waiting list for affordable housing. The need to increase the supply of housing and tackle affordability issues is a key housing policy issue. The primary requirement for affordable housing in Walsall is larger homes (3 bed plus), bungalows, and wheelchair adapted properties. There is also some need for 2 bed houses, and flats where need can be demonstrated (such as town and district centres, or areas that are predominantly family housing).

We will continue to explore innovative methods in helping house builders to accelerate stalled housing sites and to stimulate housing growth, including the use of funding streams such as the New Homes Bonus.

New Homes Bonus

The New Homes Bonus (NHB) has been introduced to provide an incentive to local authorities and communities to support housing growth. The Bonus is intended to provide additional funding to the Council equal to the national average council tax band on each additional property for a period of six years following construction. It includes an enhanced payment for affordable homes. NHB is not ring-fenced and in Walsall it has been agreed to focus NHB on activities to stimulate future housing provision and economic growth using these 6 principles:

- Developing and maintaining a policy base to support future development
- Supporting strategic acquisitions and development funding
- Supporting economic regeneration
- Stimulating future new homes provision
- Bringing empty homes back into use
- Providing for gypsies and travellers

It is intended that the first year's funding is used to stimulate new housing provision with a particular focus on unlocking stalled housing sites in Walsall.

In September 2011 Cabinet agreed that the majority 1st year spend (£866k) of New Homes Bonus (NHB) should be used to unlock stalled housing sites.

The Council has launched a competitive process, inviting bids from eligible housing providers and developers to apply for loan or grant funding. Eligibility was defined as a site being stalled, having full planning consent, and offering to provide more than 10 new homes.

The Council wrote out to all 60 developers with planning consents of 10 units or more, which included planning consents spread across all 6 Partnership Areas of the Borough.

Increasing accommodation for gypsy and travellers

The Black Country Core Strategy gives targets of achieving 39 permanent residential pitches for gypsies and travellers in Walsall and 10-12 transit plots across the Black Country. We will seek to maximise opportunities for funding of sites and work with housing providers where possible to provide this type of accommodation.

Public Land Initiative

The Public Land Initiative aims to bring publicly owned sites forward by offering land to developers from the HCA's Delivery Partner Panel (DPP) on a deferred receipt basis. The sites will be de-risked as far as possible and the public land owner will offer to take a share in loss should there be a need to reduce the sales prices when the homes are completed. This should ensure that sites which are struggling to be brought forward can meet their development potential for housing despite the uncertain economic times. Walsall is involved in phase two of the programme and will continue to work with the HCA, developers and housing associations to enable us to provide more affordable homes on key strategic sites

Based on the results of our Housing Needs Study (2010) we will review our Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Affordable Housing by September 2012 to ensure we are able to increase the supply of new affordable homes to meet the needs of our communities. The changes to the SPD will consider the possible introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy and the introduction of the Affordable Rent Model.

Priorities	Action	Targets / dates	Partners
Increasing Housing choice and employment opportunities	Enable an increase in affordable homes	2016 450 units to be completed 2012/13 – 150 2013/14 – 100 2014/15 – 100 2015/16 – 100	Walsall Council Registered Providers Developers HCA

	Support private and voluntary sector to integrate into housing and employment opportunities.	Ongoing	Walsall Council
	Support implementation of 'Local Homes' Timber Frame Unit Factory	On going The unit will construct 200 homes per year.	Accord Walsall Council
	Complete a Strategic Housing Market Assessment	September 2012	Walsall Council Black Country Local Authorities
	Enable Walsall's Black Country Core Strategy house building targets to be met	2024 units of accommodation by 2016	Walsall Council Developers
	Revise Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	September 2012	Walsall Council Registered Providers Developers HCA
	Develop Tenure Strategy	June 2012	Walsall Council Registered Providers
	Assess impact of welfare reforms	Quarterly report to Strategic Regeneration Board	Walsall Council Registered Providers
	Unblock stalled housing sites through the Walsall New Homes Bonus programme	2016 220 units allocated funding in Yr 1 (awaiting decision)	Walsall Council Developers HCA
	Consider whether to review the thresholds for affordable housing provision on new development	January 2013	Walsall Council
	Work with Registered providers to identify 'value for money' properties to purchase for affordable housing on	March 2013 Aim to bring 5 units a year into use.	Walsall Council Registered Providers

	the open market		
	Broaden the under occupation working group to enable them to initiate and co-ordinate the review of under occupancy across the borough	March 2013 Aim to rehouse 45 people per year	Walsall Council Registered Providers
	Identify potential additional permanent pitches for Gypsies and Travellers	March 2014	Walsall Council Sub Regional Partners HCA
	Review Housing Strategy action plan	Annually	Walsall Council
	Work with Registered Providers to provide private landlords with methods of advertising their properties via a Choice based Letting scheme.	March 2012	Walsall Council Voluntary sector Registered Providers NHS Walsall
	Work with developers to create new opportunities to remediate land contamination.	Ongoing	Walsall Council

Chapter 3 – Priority Regeneration Initiatives

Walsall's Local Investment Plan (LIP) has been developed in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The LIP provides a strategic framework detailing partner priorities and principles of investment to deliver the Council's vision. The LIP priorities are based on the borough's Sustainable Community Strategy:

- Creating jobs
- Reducing worklessness and improving skills
- Improving housing choice
- Improving health and reducing health Inequalities
- Developing strong and dynamic communities

The spatial priorities in the LIP are based on geographic areas where regeneration, place making and housing growth will bring positive economic change to an area. Based on deliverability, scope for housing growth, and strategic importance to Walsall as a whole, the following 6 areas are short to medium term joint investment areas as identified through the Strategic Regeneration Framework and the proposed Town Centre Regeneration Prospectus. These areas are:

- Brownhills
- Darlaston (including the Strategic Development Area)
- Goscote
- Moxley
- Walsall town centre, including neighbouring residential areas; Birchills to the north
- Willenhall

Brownhills

The Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) identifies several projects for Brownhills regeneration programme, some of which have already commenced, which includes:

- Identification of mixed tenure housing schemes next to the canal, High Street and vacant gap sites to provide over 100 new properties of mixed tenure and type. This includes the 47 home Phase 1 of the High Street scheme that started construction in March 2011 through a HCA / Walsall housing group (whg) / local authority funding package, and is due for completion in June 2012. Phase 2 of this development (33 units) is scheduled to start on site in January 2012.
- Planning permission granted for the redevelopment of a £30m new Tesco store and independent retail units, and
- Consultation on a significant programme of transport improvements for the district centre. The majority of the suggested improvements have been incorporated into the planning obligations for the new Tesco store and will be implemented as part of their redevelopment programme.

Darlaston

The Darlaston SRF identifies a proposed programme of interlinked regeneration projects including in excess of 1,000 new residential dwellings across the area. It also recognises that increased housing should help to support the centre of Darlaston. Existing regeneration projects, some of which have already commenced, include:

- The owners of the former Servis (washing machine factory) site have undertaken initial consultation with local residents and businesses to explore the potential for the regeneration of the site. Site currently has planning consent for 223 units.
- The Grace Academy Darlaston has recently been granted planning permission for a new £24 million school facility; construction starts in the summer of 2011 with the new school open for the academic year beginning 2013.
- Whitworth Close / Richards Street – planning permission has been granted for approximately 100 new homes, which will be a demonstration project for Walsall's first pre-fabricated timber framed dwellings.

Goscote Lane Corridor

Walsall Council with Walsall Housing Group (whg) are leading on the SRF for Goscote, which provide the vision and key design principles for comprehensive regeneration. There have been several projects for the Goscote Lane Corridor SRF including:

- Completion of a significant programme of acquisition and demolition with redevelopment proposals of approximately 20 hectares of vacant sites. The current redevelopment proposals include options to develop over 600 new homes and explore ways to deliver diversification of housing tenure and type.
- Barracks Lane and Well Place gateway sites are in an advanced planning stage for residential redevelopment with the potential to deliver around 100 new homes.

Moxley

The Moxley SRF area is dominated by the social housing market, mainly comprising of semi-detached houses and flats/maisonettes. As such there is a notable tenure imbalance resulting in an unbalanced socio-economic mix.

Key sites include:

- The former Harrowby Road estate owned by Walsall Housing Group is earmarked for residential development totalling approximately 200 mixed tenure dwellings.
- The APUK site – the Council has provided Growth Point funding for remediation of Phase 1, and a loan to remediate later phases to accelerate development of this major housing site.
- The Council working with the HCA are also pursuing a residential development on the site of the former Moxley Infants School by progressing an outline planning permission for up to 50 mixed tenure units by March 2012.

Willenhall

The Black Country Core Strategy outlines the broad principles and vision for the regeneration of Willenhall over the next 15 years. The strategy sees poor quality, industrial land being restructured around Willenhall to provide, in the region of 1,225 new high quality residential units and improved green spaces to add to the historic character, heritage and vitality of this

traditional town centre. Willenhall will have improved cultural, leisure, health and educational facilities to ensure a higher quality of life in the area. Improved and new public transport services will also be developed to enable the local communities and businesses to access the growing services and activities of the network of Black Country Centres, in particular Wolverhampton and Walsall.

Existing regeneration projects include;

- A number of small / medium size residential developments with planning permission on brownfield sites in areas of Willenhall. This will enable more choice and quality of housing in the area. This includes Wood Street which has planning permission for 73 new homes next to the new Morrison's supermarket
- Infrastructure improvement works
- The improvement of the town centre historic core through a million pound Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)

Walsall Town Centre Regeneration Framework

In recent years, regeneration activity in the town centre has focussed on large scale projects, a number of which are now completed or on-site, including, Walsall College, Tesco, Waterfront South housing development, Waterfront North hotel, and whg's office building. The Council is currently developing a framework for the Walsall Town Centre area.

The key challenges facing Walsall Town Centre include:

- Walsall is deemed to be "failing" – it is one of the centres nationally where the spread of vacancies and falling rents are destroying local high streets (Colliers International's Midsummer Retail Report 2011). At the end of 2009, prime rents in the town were £95 per square foot, which is 23% below the UK major town average of £123 per square foot.
- At the end of 2010 Walsall had the highest retail vacancy rate amongst large and medium-sized centres in the West Midlands, at 27% (up 8% in 12 months) against the West Midlands average of 19%. It is also the second highest vacancy rate for large towns in the country (national average is 17%).

The aim of the framework is to transform Walsall Town Centre into a thriving and prosperous strategic centre with a comprehensive retail, leisure, professional and service sector offer in a high quality urban environment. We will deliver actions to create a town that can perform within the top quartile comparable UK provincial towns. This will improve the quality and choice for those living in the borough and will aim to attract people into the borough.

The Walsall Town Centre Framework comprises four key elements, made up of short, medium and long term actions intended to transform the town centre:

- A marketing tool, to promote investment and improve the public image
- Town Centre operations, focusing on day-to-day management issues
- The Delivery Plan (prioritisation, timescales, and phasing)
- The Area Action Plan (AAP)

An Area Action Plan (AAP) is a long term plan which will allocate sites within the town centre for development for new shops, leisure and office facilities, as well as setting out strategies for other aspects including transport and the environment. The AAP will set the planning framework for the town centre, and when adopted it will be the basis on which planning

decisions are made within the area. The preparation of such a detailed and robust plan reflects the importance of Walsall town centre.

The key dates for the production of the AAP are set out below, as indicated in Local Development Scheme (June 2011).

Stage	Dates
Start	July 2011
Consultation on Issues and Options	January 2012
Consultation on Preferred Option	July/ August 2012
Publication	January 2013
Submission to Secretary of State	March 2013
Pre-examination Meeting	May 2013
Examination Begins	July 2013
Adoption	December 2013

Birchills

Birchills is located on the edge of Walsall town centre and includes some of the most deprived communities in the borough. There is a need to expand the range of housing in the area and to provide more aspirational housing options. This will encourage people to stay in the area and attract a broader range of people to the neighbourhood.

The vision for the area has 3 themes:

1. *Environment* - improving the streets and spaces of the neighbourhood.
2. *Housing* - opportunities to widen housing choice locally and improve the housing stock.
3. *Community & Economy* - measures to improve prospects of local people and businesses.

In Birchills there is the potential for 1,100 new homes. There are a number of development sites which have the potential to come forward in the short to medium term:

- Former Caparo site – the site is suitable for residential development of up to 310 units based on previous planning consents.
- Hollyhedge Lane phase 1 – a planning application has been submitted for 122 homes.
- Norfolk Place Depot site – full planning permission of 264 new homes.
- Former Reedswood Golf Course – the Council has explored the potential for housing development.
- Birch Street site – the Council and the private sector co-owner are currently discussing the possibility of residential development on the part of the site that is not constrained by the mine.

ACTION PLAN

Priorities	No Units	Milestones	Targets / dates	Partners
High Street, Brownhills – Phase 1	47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development commenced on site Complete construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2011 June 2012 	whg, Walsall Council, HCA
High Street, Brownhills Phase 2	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence construction Complete construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jan 2012 Jan 2013 	whg, HCA
Land at Silver Street / Watermead Grange, Brownhills	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence construction Complete construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dec 2011 2013 	Morris Homes
Former Warreners Arms PH, High Street, Brownhills	56	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence Construction Complete construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2012 2013 	To be agreed by landowner
Grace Academy, Darlaston	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works started on site New School building completed and open Demolition of existing school Completion on site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Late 2011 Summer 2013 Summer 2013 Summer 2014 	Walsall Council, Grace Foundation, Kier Group
Whitworth Close/Richards St, Darlaston	106	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permission granted subject to conditions Works on site Complete construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer 2011 Late 2011 2013 	Accord Housing Mar City HCA
Land at the Green, Castle Street, Darlaston	22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permission granted subject to conditions Commence construction Complete construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer 2011 Autumn 2011 2012 	Central and country developments Walsall Council HCA
Well Place, Blakenall	32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence construction Complete construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feb 2012 Mar 2013 	Whg, HCA
Heathfield Lane West, Moxley	Up to 304	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline permission granted for 304 residential units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2008 	Walsall Council, LPC Living

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discharge of conditions granted to allow first phase remediation works – funding from Growth Point and other loans to facilitate works Phase one full planning application Phase 1 build out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2010 2012 2013/14 	
Former George Carter Pressings, Clothier Street, Willenhall	22	<p>07/1156/FL/W6: Planning permission for the erection of 22 houses and apartments.</p> <p>10/1131/TE: Time extension of planning approval</p>	<p>2010</p> <p>To be agreed</p>	Private ownership, potentially seeking RP partner
Norfolk Place Depot, Walsall	200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development commenced on site Complete construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2011 2014 	Mar City
Waterfront South Phase 2	164	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence construction Complete construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2010 2012 	Jessup Brothers Accord Group Walsall Council HCA
Wood Street	Up to 77	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning permission for 77 unit Commence construction Complete construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2010 <p>To be agreed</p>	Private ownership, Potentially seeking RP partner

Chapter 4 – tackling fuel poverty and improving the quality and energy efficiency of existing and future homes

We will improve the standard of existing and future homes through a variety of initiatives by:

- Supporting independence and adapting properties
- Bringing empty dwellings back into use
- Improving Private Sector housing standards
- Promoting and delivering energy efficiency and fuel poverty initiatives

The private sector consists of 81,118 properties, of these owner occupation is the key tenure with 67,983 homes (84% of the private stock) and 8,385 properties are private rented (10% of the stock). Our stock condition survey¹⁶ showed overcrowding; excess cold and falls as the biggest hazards in the private sector respectively. Our Housing Renewal Assistance Policy¹⁷ details our priority actions which will help make stock in the borough decent and free from hazards for our residents.

Supporting Independence/adapting properties

We are working with Social Care and Inclusion to maximise both the availability of new adapted homes and in adapting existing homes. This includes 4 former residents of nursing and care homes. This will help people with a disability to live more independently within the community.

Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs)

The Council will continue to work with partners to maximise the number of households benefiting from the available DFG resources. This work includes;

- Reducing cost of adaptations wherever possible
- Securing the maximum number of adapted homes from housing associations to assist those households able to move
- Applying relevant land charges on properties to provide future 'recycling' of funds for adaptation
- Securing whenever possible additional funds to assist with the cost of adaptations

We will explore the viability of developing a system to enable residents to use their 'Individual / Personal budgets' to secure adaptations along with safeguarding methods in our systems and processes to ensure that vulnerable residents are protected. We plan to adapt 1000 homes over the coming 5 years.

Preventative Adaptations Grants

During 2011/12 the Council will be delivering additional assistance to help owner occupiers, who do not meet the statutory DFG criteria to continue to live independently. This assistance is based on funds offered for works costing up to £12,000 per property. The assistance is

¹⁶ Private Sector House Condition Survey, Prepared by David Adamson and Partners for Walsall council, March 2008

¹⁷ Walsall Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2011-2012, Walsall council January 2011

100% land / property charged so that when the owner moves or sells or transfers their home the funds are returned to the Council so that someone else can be assisted.

Handyperson scheme

In 2011/12 we will continue to offer assistance to householders aged 55 or over and who need assistance with minor repairs around the home. We will promote the service in areas of high deprivation and will help target those at risk of injury from slips, trips and falls.

Equity Loans – ‘Kickstart’

The Council will encourage and enable home owners to invest in the maintenance and improvement of their own homes. Some households are not in the position to secure finance through high street lenders. The Council therefore has previously piloted a loan product aimed at such households called, Kickstart Equity Release Loans. Whilst funding is not currently available for this the Council will continue to seek external resources to enable projects such as this to deliver benefits for vulnerable local residents.

Bringing empty dwelling back into use

The borough has a significant number of empty homes. Resources to help address empty homes have been very limited and it is anticipated that in the future that the key source will be the New Homes Bonus (which will have significant competing demands). The council will seek to identify owners of empty homes, discuss with them their intentions and timescale for re-use and, where plans are inappropriate or unreasonable, seek to use a range of enforcement powers.

The Council aims to bring empty homes which have been empty for over 2 years back into use by:

- Addressing the underlying causes of vacancies through Housing Renewal
- Responding to incidents of problematic vacant properties through intervention and enforcement
- Proactively working with partners to deliver solutions

The Council and partners has a range of services that identify empty homes including those that cause either a nuisance or problem for their local area. A single list with priority for action is collated to ensure that resources are targeted at returning properties to use as soon as practicable and to minimise their impact upon amenity.

There are a range of options to support the re-use of empty homes that are included within the Council's Housing Enforcement Policy.

The Council has a published prioritisation scheme for managing pro-active action on void / empty dwellings. This is based on the current (and anticipated) staff resources within the Council to tackle empty properties and gives priority to those where there is a risk to the public. The priority properties are dwellings which have been referred from the Fire Service following a fire, protecting people from harm due to potential unauthorised access to the empty property and anti-social behaviour.

The Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) are designed to secure the continued re-occupation of the empty property. The Council will seek to develop an agreement with

housing partners to carry out housing management duties where EDMOs are in place. We will make use of EDMOs where we are confident that this represents the best course of action.

We will write to the owners of 1,500 homes that have been empty for at least six months, offering help in selling or finding housing association partners to lease their properties out under the affordable homes programme.

We will use the New Homes Bonus to provide loans to help homeowners whose properties are in administration following a death.

The Bonus, which started in April, matches the council tax for any new home, or any empty property brought back into use, for the first six years.

The Council will join up with local with the aim of using some of the Homes and Communities Agency's £100 million empty homes grant.

Under the plan, landlords would apply for HCA funding to improve homes and bring them up to the decent homes standard before taking on management of the properties.

Improving Private Sector Housing Standards

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is a system for assessing the health and safety risks in homes. Landlords should provide a safe and healthy environment for any occupier. The Council has developed a Housing Enforcement Policy¹⁸ and we will prioritise cases where there are Category 1 hazards. This work directly improves the lives of people living in the private rented sector. It is expected that during the timescale of this strategy that the private rented sector will grow.

The Council is committed to improving the condition and availability of private rented homes in the borough. We will continue to:

- Work with private landlords and letting agents to investigate the opportunity to develop a social letting agency
- Provide those in the private sector with regular landlord newsletters
- Hold twice yearly Landlord Forums
- Promote Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme (MLAS)
- Promote Walsall Fire Protocol with West Midlands Fire Service
- Attend and contribute to regional private sector and empty dwelling best practice groups

We will work with partners through the Homestamp consortium to develop initiatives like 'Read this First' which provide details to landlords and tenants in the private rented sector on their rights and responsibilities. We will contribute to the education project through Homestamp which will provide young people with information and guidance on housing choice as part of the Citizenship programme.

The Housing Standards team also provides training and support for key workers who directly support tenants to maximise the availability and quality of information for private tenants and landlords. By increasing the understanding of key workers on potential hazards in the home it will enable us to direct support and advice to those homeowners.

¹⁸ Walsall Housing Enforcement Policy 2011-2012, Walsall Council, March 2011

In addition to this pro-active work the Council will use when necessary a range of enforcement powers to improvement the condition of private rented accommodation.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) are those which are occupied by 3 or more persons who form more than 1 household who share an amenity such as a toilet, bathroom or kitchen. HMO's can also include bedsits, shared houses, halls of residence and self-contained flats.

The Council is responsible for checking Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) to make sure they are free from hazards and in safe condition. Our Healthy HMOs project improved the health and safety of residents living in HMOs and in particular improves housing related health issues. We will continue to sign-post people living in HMOs to a range of services including education and welfare rights services.

HMO Licensing

The Housing Act 2004 places a statutory duty on authorities to effectively implement licensing on specific types of HMOs.

We will routinely check licensed HMO's and continue to assess conditions in the property using the HHSRS. We will use enforcement powers available to us to ensure our HMOs are safe and free from category 1 hazards.

The Council maintains a public register of all;

- Licensed HMOs
- Temporary Exemption Notices; and
- Management Orders issued,

We are pro-actively surveying the Borough to ensure all properties which require a licence are licensed. Since the introduction of licensing, 18 HMO's have been licensed, and we aim to identify hotspot areas by April 2014 for future licensing.

Caravan Parks and Mobile Home sites

Caravan Sites and Mobile Homes Parks are covered by legislation which in some circumstances requires them to be licensed. One of the key factors considered in evaluating caravan and mobile home parks is the risk of fire and fire spread. The Council will continue to work in partnership with West Midlands Fire Service and License holders to ensure that fire prevention is a high priority at the sites and in the review of licenses.

We will license mobile homes and caravans through statutory licensing and we will work proactively with people living in mobile homes to promote the Statutory Model Living Conditions 2008.¹⁹

¹⁹ Model Standards 2008 for Caravan Sites in England
Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 – Section 5

Home Energy and Tackling Fuel Poverty

Fuel poverty occurs when a household is unable to afford adequate warmth, due to the combined effect of low household income, inadequate thermal insulation and/or inefficient and uneconomic heating systems, cost of fuel and under occupying their home. The Council's Affordable Warmth Strategy (2007-10) is currently being reviewed and a combined Affordable Warmth and Green Deal Strategy will be published in 2012 to cover the period 2012 to 2015. This will include initiatives to reduce fuel poverty and place Walsall at the centre of the Black Country for delivery of innovation and development in domestic retro-fit.

The Energy Act 2011 made provisions for the development of a Green Deal and a new Energy Company Obligation (ECO) to replace the existing carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) and the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP), which will both expire in 2012.

Green Deal is a market led framework that will allow individuals and businesses to make energy efficiency improvements to their buildings at no upfront cost. Central to the Green Deal is a finance mechanism that will allow access to the finance needed for the improvements with repayment, in instalments, attached to the electricity bill.

Underpinning the delivery of the Green Deal is the ECO. ECO will place one or more obligations on energy companies requiring them to generate a specific amount of credit by facilitating the installation of energy efficiency measures in homes in Great Britain before a set deadline. ECO has been designed to fit within the Green Deal framework and provide support, in the domestic sector, where Green Deal finance alone is not enough.

The Green Deal framework is a key element of the Energy Bill due to be implemented in the first session of this Parliament. It is anticipated the Green Deal will be launched in autumn 2012.

- **December 2010** – introduction of the Energy Bill to Parliament
- **Pre-autumn 2011** – officials engage stakeholders as they develop the technical details for secondary legislation
- **Autumn 2011** – formal consultation on secondary legislation
- **Early 2012** – secondary legislation laid before Parliament
- **Spring 2012** – detailed industry guidance prepared
- **Autumn 2012** – first Green Deals appear

Retrofitting is a process of fitting energy efficiency measures to existing homes, including water saving measures and insulation. Some of these measures can contribute to affordable warmth and reducing the carbon footprint. The Council will work with Housing Associations to maximise access to HCA and European funding for Retrofit. We will look into developing a pilot project in Walsall in the private housing sector.

The Council has used previous Regional Housing Pot funds to develop nationally acclaimed partnership projects such as the Walsall Npower Health Through Warmth Project, and secured the country's first rounds of Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) projects in partnership with British Gas and whg. The Council will continue to maximise funding to deliver affordable warmth, and link to the retrofit proposals.

The government directive is to develop a Local Standards Framework by April 2012 to replace the additional building standards and codes that have been attached to planning permissions. In the meantime, existing HCA standards, including Code 3 of the Code for

Sustainable Homes (CSH) and Building for Life requirements, will continue to apply to new affordable housing. We will work with developers and registered providers to promote energy efficient development to CSH Level 4, increasing to level 6 over the life of this Strategy. We want Walsall to act as an exemplar for energy efficiency on new housing which in turn will make Walsall more attractive to manufacturing and assembly businesses for energy efficient housing and products in the future. The Council will promote HCA schemes which exceed current HCA standards, which would currently mean CSH level 4 or above.

We will promote affordable warmth through our updated Affordable Warmth Strategy and a range of media, raise energy awareness through training and education and maximise 'take up' of assistance available, by residents. We will continue to maximise funding and resources from existing and established sources and explore alternative funding mechanisms to grants. We will extend awareness through partnerships with educational organisations. This will include working in schools and adult education providers. We will identify vulnerable and more isolated groups and prioritise help where necessary to ensure our services reach everyone. We will assist and encourage private landlords to achieve affordable warmth in their properties.

Priorities	Action	Targets / dates	Partners
Tackling fuel poverty and improving the quality and energy efficiency of existing and future homes	Review effectiveness of Housing Renewal Assistance Policy	Annually	Walsall Council
	Explore the viability of the use of personal budgets for adaptations	March 2013	Walsall Council Voluntary sector
	Promote handyperson scheme to targeted areas in the borough. The handyman service will provides works to prevent trips and falls in the home.	On-going Book 300 jobs per year	Walsall Council Voluntary sector Registered Providers
	Create a green event for local businesses	March 2013	Walsall Council
	Investigate the viability of a loan product which enables owner occupiers to release equity in their homes	March 2013	Walsall Council
	Develop a Empty Dwelling Management Order	March 2013	Walsall Council Registered Providers

	(EDMO) agreement with housing partners		
	Monitor and review Housing Enforcement Policy	Annually	Walsall Council
	Deliver in partnership with Homestamp an Education project in secondary schools	March 2012	Walsall Council Homestamp Consortium
	Conduct a Private Sector Stock Condition survey	March 2013	Walsall Council Homestamp Consortium NHS Walsall
	Conduct research into the locations of HMOs in Walsall	March 2013	Walsall Council Voluntary sector Registered Providers
	Develop Affordable Warmth and Green Deal Strategy	May 2012	Walsall Council Voluntary sector Registered Providers NHS Walsall
	Develop Black Country Green Deal Strategy	October 2012	Black Country Local Authorities HCA
	Continue to develop accreditation scheme to the private rented sector not currently engaged	Annually 25 Per year	Walsall Council Private landlords

Chapter 5 - Addressing different needs and promoting independent living, health and well-being

We want to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people in the borough and reduce health inequalities and enable people to live more independently in their homes for longer. We want to ensure people receive help and support to enable them to maintain or increase their ability to participate in community life, prevent homelessness and avoid admission to hospital or residential care. We will continue to support independence and we will provide a platform for reducing health inequality and creating housing opportunity for all. Our priority intervention areas are:

- Promoting independence and choice
- Reducing health inequalities
- Delivering prevention initiatives

Promoting independence and choice

The 2010 Housing Needs Study Update showed 15% of all households in Walsall contain a person with a support need, with the largest group being those with a physical disability. The analysis demonstrated that 2.1% of households (2,205) contain more than one person with support needs, and 3.7% (3,933) of households contain a person with multiple support needs.

We want to encourage people to live more independently. The Council estimates that 60 housing units will be needed over the next five years to meet the needs and aspirations of people in the borough with a learning disability. The Council will need to provide suitable accommodation in Walsall for 16 people currently placed outside the borough, who are expensive to maintain and would be more beneficial to the household to be housed in Walsall. We recognise the potential of unmet and newly arising need from those people who are 18 and those people who are leaving residential care. There is also a need to identify people whose housing situation has changed and now have a need for a different type of accommodation. Our Housing 21 schemes have been revised to take into consideration those people with learning disabilities. This will add to the choice and quality of homes available for people.

The older population will increase significantly over the coming years. The Housing Needs Study 2010 shows nearly two thirds of older person households are owner-occupied without a mortgage and make up more than half of all owner-occupiers without a mortgage. The council, in partnership with Housing 21, developed a four year programme to re-provide existing residential homes for older people and replace them with five new build extra care schemes in the Aldridge, Brownhills, Delves, Mossley and Short Heath areas. The Council has identified a requirement for an increase in Extra Care Developments to be provided in the Darlaston / Bentley and Pheasey/Paddock areas; this will increase housing choice and opportunities for older people which may increase the supply of larger affordable homes that are currently being under-occupied. The schemes will also promote independence and social inclusion, and improve the health and quality of life of older people.

The Council has also identified a need for affordable bungalows. This will enable people to live in suitable homes for longer and we will continue to support developments for this type of housing through our Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Affordable Housing.

We know that immigration patterns are changing. Black and minority ethnic groups (BME) constitute a larger proportion of the population in Walsall than in the rest of the West Midlands and England and Wales²⁰. We will monitor the effectiveness of its communication methods to ensure;

- Language does not operate as a barrier to accessing services
- Effective utilisation of the services of the BME Community organisations and existing networks to disseminate information
- Views of BME communities are obtained, and then used to develop a culturally sensitive approach to consultation which recognises the impact of ethnicity and gender.

The Housing and Support Needs in Walsall for People with Mental Health Problems report 2008/09²¹ made recommendations to meet the accommodation needs of people with mental health problems by updating estimates of need for different types of accommodation, mapping current provision and identifying gaps. Significant developments have taken place since these findings were published which has included improving the recording of information and data on all of our customers.

We will provide a range of housing options tailored to meet the needs of our customers. This will include working closer with the private rented sector and ensuring people have the choice to live in an area suited to their lifestyle. We will work with our customers to promote home-buy products where possible enabling people to access health and employment opportunities.

Reducing Health Inequalities

People with a social care need have the right to safe and good quality homes. We know where people live is closely linked to their general health and well-being.

People with mental health issues in particular can often find themselves homeless and this in turn can have a greater impact on their health and well-being. People with mental health conditions are more likely to live in rented accommodation than to be home owners. Mental ill health is frequently cited as a reason for tenancy breakdown with rent arrears being a major issue behind many evictions. The Health and Social Care Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2009) reported that the level of people in residential care and institutional settings in Walsall is above average.

The Council will continue to work in partnership with Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust to ensure timely housing advice is provided to all people with long-term mental health issues on admission to hospital. Our floating support service has helped people on discharge from hospital to return to the community and achieve independent living and helps people access treatment, employment and promote social inclusion. We will also work with our service users to help them find suitable accommodation with the right level of

²⁰ Office for National Statistics 2007 estimates by ethnicity and local authority

²¹ http://www.walsall.gov.uk/housing_and_support_needs_in_walsall_for_people_with_mental_health_problems_-_final_report.pdf

support. To help improve overall understanding of mental health in relation to housing and priority needs for re-housing, the 'Managing Mental Health vulnerability priority referral form for housing' has been developed. By providing this relevant information, a consistent approach can be given by housing partners when considering priority for re-housing. This form replaces individual Social Needs Reports produced by mental health professionals in support of housing applications where a social need is identified.

Where possible we will work with developers and house-builders to encourage them to build to Lifetime Homes Standard, a set of 16 non-statutory design criteria that provide a model for building accessible and adaptable homes. The standard is good practice and enables a person is able to live in their homes for longer.

There is an identified need to access alternative adapted accommodation. The Council works closely with Walsall Adapted Housing Service and they hold a waiting list of approximately 400 households waiting to transfer to an affordable adapted property. These households are matched to existing adapted properties when they become available, but there is a clear shortfall of new fully wheelchair-adapted properties. The Council will work with partners to encourage developers to deliver units to Lifetime Homes Standard. We will also continue to working to streamline our Disabled Facilities Grant process so that we can deliver faster adaptations to people in their homes, which will include wheelchair access.

Delivering Prevention

The Council and NHS Walsall Prevention Strategy²² supports the delivery of the national Putting People First milestones and the Primary Care Trust's (PCT) World Class Commissioning priorities to maximise independence and well-being and build a sustainable community. It complements the strategic commissioning plans of Walsall Council and NHS Walsall and links with the priorities of Walsall Strategic Partnership which co-ordinates the work across health, the local authority and other key stakeholders.

The Joint Commissioning Unit (JCU) will deliver innovative preventative services across the borough and will work in partnership with many different organisations in the private, voluntary and public sectors. We will maximise opportunities to work with voluntary organisations in the delivery of social enterprises as we recognise that the constraint on resources will affect the level and availability of public services.

The JCU will aim to help vulnerable people by developing a range of housing options in partnership with strategic colleagues and aligned commissioning activity between adult social care and health. The JCU will deliver a range of services in the future with a focus on prevention which will offer help, advice, support and practical assistance. This will prevent people reaching crisis and/or experiencing a deterioration of their health or situation.

The JCU is embarking on a major programme of investment in telecare and telehealth linked to the community alarms service and will develop a Centre for Independent Living. We will work with the JCU and support the evaluation of Extra Care type developments. This will involve data collection and analysis on the current social housing stock available, an assessment on need and demand and this will inform future projections.

²² Draft Prevention strategy 2011-2014, Walsall Council

Priorities	Action	Targets / dates	Partners
Addressing different needs and promoting independent living, health and well-being	Support delivery of Telecare and Telehealth linked to the community alarms service	March 2013	Walsall Council Voluntary sector
	Work with housing providers to encourage build to Lifetime Homes Standard, and wheelchair adapted homes where possible	On-going	Walsall Council Development Partners Registered Providers
	Support the evaluation of Extra Care housing solutions	On-going	Walsall Council Development Partners Registered Providers
	Research the housing needs and aspirations of different groups and new and emerging communities	March 2012	Walsall Council Voluntary sector Registered Providers

Chapter 6 – Preventing and Tackling Homelessness

Walsall Council's housing service has made significant progress since the last Homelessness Strategy in 2007 by achieving a sustained reduction in the Council's use of temporary accommodation, ending of the use of bed and breakfast for homeless households and by supporting many people into secure accommodation which they have maintained, stopping the circle of repeat homelessness.

Recognising the Council's successes, recent trends in the levels of homelessness has meant there are different challenges for the next 5 years. The Council's Housing Options service has over 5000 households per year seeking help to resolve a housing difficulty. High levels of worklessness and deprivation mean that home ownership is out of reach for many local residents and is an increasing reason for housing instability. Demand related to individual vulnerability remains high from a range of different sources including those undergoing transitions from the criminal justice system, young people leaving home due to relationship break-down and mortgage repossessions.

The focus of our objectives for homelessness is through earlier intervention, providing an increased range of self-help options, building on a robust framework for multi agency working and the re-integration of homeless people into mainstream society through achieving economic prosperity and a more stable home.

To prevent and tackle homelessness in Walsall our key objectives for the next 5 years are:

1. Prevention of homelessness,
2. Supporting customers to financial security, training and employment
3. Providing easy access to accommodation and support that maximises self help,

1 - Preventing homelessness

Prevention of homelessness is important as it can minimise the personal trauma experienced by people and can be a cost effective method of dealing with homelessness before often expensive emergency measures have to be put in place.

We will deliver a range of interventions which will aim to address the key causes of homelessness. Relationship breakdown was the main reason for homelessness for Walsall in 2010/11. This includes exclusion by parents and family members, divorces and separation and domestic abuse.

Within the housing options team we are developing the skills to negotiate with families to facilitate young people staying in the family home longer to reduce unplanned moves and homelessness. The Council is committed to preventing homelessness effectively, in 2010/11 we successfully prevented over 900 households from becoming homeless and are working with partner agencies to sustain and where possible improve this.

The Council is committed to helping young people make the right choices for them in terms of the housing pathway and the Council with Homestamp a sub regional consortium are developing housing related lesson plans for years 10 to 11 which will be piloted in local schools in 2011/2012.

Domestic Violence

The council has made it a priority to reduce domestic violence and produced Walsall's Domestic Abuse Strategy²³ in 2011 in which housing plays a significant role. Our Housing Options Service plays a part of the plan and will actively promote the take up of the Sanctuary scheme as a housing option which helps victims of domestic violence to remain in their own homes by the provision of a safe room. The Council has also reviewed its allocation policy with its registered providers of social housing to enable priority move for victims of domestic violence, the avoidance of temporary accommodation. We will also support the work of MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) which provides a forum for inter-agency information sharing in a bid to help increase the safety, health and wellbeing of high risk victims of domestic abuse and their families.

Rough Sleepers

Historically the estimated numbers of rough sleepers has been low. Walsall Severe Weather Emergency Partnership (SWEP), set up in 2010 following an unpredicted period of cold weather is using local intelligence and data along with a multi-agency annual count to obtain a more accurate picture of the extent of rough sleeping in the borough. In Walsall we have supported the work of agencies such as street pastors who offer advice and guidance at key times late evenings and weekends. We support the work of voluntary agencies such and the Glebe St Centre and Hi & Low's who offer a range of welfare and support services to rough sleepers and sofa surfers. We have a named housing officer who works with the voluntary sector to pick up any of the housing needs which we can support.

Walsall is leading jointly on regional work with neighbouring authorities to further reduce rough sleeping in areas. This will enable us to determine the true extent of rough sleeping sub regionally and identify actions to address issues after an initial scoping exercise by March 2012.

Prevention

We will further develop the prevention agenda and joint working with registered providers on incorporating homelessness prevention into their procedures for dealing with rent arrears, anti-social behaviour and harassment. We will work with private landlords to support landlord accreditation so our landlords are knowledgeable about housing management and work with the housing options service to prevent the breakdown of tenancy. We will improve the use of the private sector as a sustainable alternative to social housing including partnership working with private sector landlords and support for private sector tenants. The Council will develop a bond scheme in partnership with private sector landlords as a method of securing a broader range of accommodation for homeless people. Landlord accreditation has also created a list of reputable landlords offering suitable accommodation.

We will continue to provide training to a wide range of agencies on preventing homelessness and develop a range of referral protocols including future work with a hospital discharge protocol by March 2012.

²³ Domestic Abuse Strategy 2011-2014, A Time for Change, Walsall Council, March 2011

We will continue supporting the most vulnerable people in Walsall, developing services to meet their needs, , promote independence, health and wellbeing. .

We recognise that a vulnerable person might be someone who is affected by severe debt problems, mental health issues or a long-term illness. .

2 - Support Customers to financial security, training and employment.

The key measure in supporting customers through the current economic climate is

- Reduce the impact of debt
- Promotion of training and employment opportunities

Debt

We have seen a significant increase in the number of households who are at risk of losing their homes as a result of the economic situation. The Housing response to the economic recession is a multi-agency approach and relies on good partnership working with key agencies such as social landlords, private landlords, CAB and Job Centre Plus.

Debt may either be cause or a consequence of homelessness or unstable accommodation. Problems with debt can contribute to people being financially excluded, which in turn make it difficult to open a bank account, get a tenancy or access credit.

The Housing Options Service will be exploring opportunities to extend tenancy support to increase the capacity to reduce arrears and financial problems at the earliest stage. The service will also continue to work with and fund the CAB to provide financial advice to customers at risk of losing their homes and to develop the debt advice skills within the housing options team.

Given the potential impact of the housing benefit changes to existing tenants we will be working with our registered providers and funding an officer in the housing benefit department to ensure that the benefit changes are communicated to residents and plans are put in place at the earliest opportunity to mitigate the impact of benefit change.

The council is developing a scheme which aims to support people into accommodation who have previously lost their homes due to rent arrears. The scheme will be rolled -out to all RP's by March 2012

Court Desk

A Court Desk is a facility within Court premises, to ensure that any household facing repossession and attending Court can be properly represented. We aim to help 50 households through the Court Desk service in 2011/2012.

Mortgage Rescue

The Council offer the government mortgage rescue scheme to vulnerable home owners at risk of losing their home through repossession within our borough. The current scheme is under review by government but Walsall is looking to ensure that this help is available to

residents of the borough as 25 families have been helped by this scheme since it was started. We will help a further 7 families in 2011/2012. This includes liaising with lenders, sign-posting and offering advice on housing options.

Rent Deposit

Rent deposit or guarantee schemes can remove financial obstacles to private renting, provide advice and support, and liaise with landlords. Over the last 3 years Walsall Council has helped 40 families per year with either rent in advance or the deposit needed to obtain an appropriate tenancy.

The Council introduced a bond deposit scheme in September 2011. The scheme offers private sector landlords the same financial security as a cash deposit and the local authority provides assurance for the deposit amount. To date (November 2011) 15 homes have been found via the Bond for vulnerable households.

Banking/Finance

The Council supports multi-agency work with the Wincred scheme. Wincred delivers themed response to tackling financial exclusion by establishing initiatives relating to:

1. Access to affordable credit
2. Accessible money advice
3. Affordable insurance
4. Tackling fuel poverty
5. Preventing Homelessness
6. Facilitating access to basic bank accounts

A borough wide Financial Inclusion Strategy is also currently being developed which is due to be completed by March 2012.

Training and employment

Walsall Council will continue to provide early sign posting to training, education and employment to those presenting to the Housing Options Service and asking for housing advice. We will be working with Job Centre Plus to install internet access in the Council reception to provide links to employments services. Using the new housing advice system which will be proposed for 2012 housing options staff will produce advice and guidance which will demonstrate the benefits of work for housing options including advice on benefits and tax credits.

We will also in partnership with Steps to Work piloting a scheme aimed at vulnerable households in supported accommodation ensuring they have access to a full range of specialist employment and training advice through the appointment of an outreach project officer.

Multi agency working

Walsall Council is working with colleagues from Connexions to develop a base within one of its supported housing projects to see all young people and encourages them into training.

The Council also work with Juniper Training (formerly Carver Training) a privately owned company that helps people of all ages and backgrounds to develop the confidence, knowledge and skills needed to find and keep a job. Juniper also specialises in those who have spent some time being excluded from traditional education. The profile of residents in temporary accommodation will be reviewed to include and assessment of skills/qualification levels which can be used to target residents to training and employment opportunities.

Age UK also provides some training and individual courses for young people within the council's supported housing projects. Link workers also encourage people to engage in training and employment as part of their personal success plans.

3 – Provide easy access to accommodation and support that maximises self help

It is important that households in housing difficulties are supported to find solutions. We will deliver:

- Effective referral pathways into specialist accommodation
- Improve supported accommodation and Move On

It is important that supported accommodation and other facilities within the borough provide the best opportunities for their clients to move forward into work and settled homes. Both these issues will become significant parts of the support plan used by accommodation providers in order that residents are encouraged and empowered to take advantage of training and job opportunities, and are prepared for a move into settled accommodation.

To address this it is essential that we make the most effective use of the current provision ensuring that referrals are appropriate and based on a comprehensive assessment of need, and that vacancies are prioritised to those in most need. We have developed a single point of access into supported housing in the borough in partnership with the Joint Commissioning Unit (JCU) called the 'Gateway' this new process will be reviewed to ensure that vulnerable people continue to access accommodation and/or support when they are in need.

Planning for care leavers is a priority to ensure that an early application is made to the housing register, and that a timely offer of appropriate accommodation is made to coincide with the end of the care placement. Housing is also working to develop a housing pathway from care into independence which will include supported lodging. Our Joint Protocol for Young Homeless People includes care leavers and defines the processes and procedures for inter-agency working, and results in a more efficient transition for the care leaver into independent living.

Advice and Assistance

We recognise the growing trend in customers accessing our services for advice and assistance over the past 2 years. We will proactively support and empower people to self-help which will lead to people making their own informed decisions in a timely way. We will review our communications and consultation tools including regular review of our website and deliver our information in more innovative ways by September 2012. We will also ensure that there are regular articles in the local press, explore the viability of housing advice

surgeries on local radio stations, and that Housing Options Service is represented at local events throughout the borough.

The Council will be introducing a new homelessness Information Technology System in partnership with whg which will enable housing options staff to supplement their advice with an electronic service which gathers information about the household involved using a wizard, and produces a comprehensive, personalised action plan. Key benefits include:

- Less time spent on interviews
- Greater consistency of advice offered
- New staff can be trained more effectively
- Improved levels of homelessness prevention

The Council will also develop a step by step guide to empower people to have the confidence to try and address their own housing issues which will also signpost to voluntary agencies that could offer emotional support.

The service will be also providing new documentation which will signpost households in housing difficulty to ways in which they can help themselves by providing the right information at the right time and prevent people from reaching crisis point.

Homelessness Outcome	Action Required	Targets/ Dates	Partners
	Develop a strategy to address the issues around rough sleeping in the borough, piloting a personalised programme of support for entrenched rough sleepers	Reduce the number of rough sleepers by 50% by 2016	Walsall Council Voluntary sector Drug and Alcohol misuse services and commissioners.
	Lead on regional activity around preventing and tackling rough sleeping adapting a Regional 'No Second Night Out' strategy	March 2013	Other local authorities Sub regional agencies
	Develop a single point of access for homeless vulnerable customers to obtain either appropriate accommodation or support to meet their needs. The Accommodation & Support Gateway will be introduced in 4 stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 1 Youth Homelessness • Stage 2 Complex needs • Stage 3 Offenders • Stage 4 Domestic Abuse 	October 2012	Walsall Council Registered Providers Probation
	Review Service Level Agreement with	March 2013	Walsall

	Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) around provision of specialist services relating to repossessions/evictions	Support 50 households in mortgage difficulties per annum.	Council CAB
	Scope out financial initiatives to prevent homelessness with CAB partner	March 2012	Walsall Council
	Implement a Bond Scheme to secure accommodation in the private rented sector	March 2013 Bring 60 units of privately rented accommodation into use by October 2013	Walsall Council
	Maintain and improve front line services with capacity to deal with 5,000 visitors to the first stop shop who require housing advice	March 2013	Walsall Council Registered Providers
	Pilot a 'Self Help' tool for customers to seek their own information around housing options.	March 2013 Ensure that at least 10% of our customers seek advice and guidance from the Self Help tools	Walsall Council Registered Providers

Chapter 7 – Resourcing our strategic priorities

To achieve the objectives that have been set a variety of resources will be required - financial, physical (including land) and organisational capacity. The Council's main sources of funding for housing related activity is, the HCA, Area Based Grant, the council's general fund and other government grants. The Council's general fund is the central funding source for the council and contains the Council's share of the council tax levied in the borough and income from other sources. This funding mix has within it inherent challenges. The Council will be freezing its council tax charges which will lead to a reduction in spend available from the general fund. Government funding is also under considerable pressure at the moment with resources being reduced across public service. Any available resources are now being allocated where the greatest output can be generated and partners are being asked to work together to make best use of available public funds. As a consequence any reduction in funding availability from central government or locally will have a material effect on Walsall Council's ability to deliver services as planned.

We want to maximise investment opportunities to ensure our housing vision and priorities are delivered. We will work closely with partner agencies including Registered Providers, the Homes and Communities Agency and other councils within the region to secure external funding and increase the range of resources available.

The Site Allocation Development Plan Document and Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan will be prepared in 2011-13. These documents will identify sites for housing, as well as other uses, and we will continue to work together to develop mechanisms to deliver these sites including public and private sector funding.

Capital resources

The Capital Strategy is the council's financial management framework. It determines the level of capital resources available and sets out the processes and policies which influence capital investment.

The Capital Programme sets out the council's investment priorities over the next 4 years and how it's financed through a mixture of borrowing, capital receipts and specific grants from the Government. Table 1 provides details of our indicative programme.

Table 1 – Indicative Housing Capital Programme

	2010/11 £000's	2011/12 £000's	2012/13 £000's	2013/14 £000's	
Funded through Mainstream					
Aids and Adaptations	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	
Preventative Adaptations	0	1,000	1,000	1,000	
Supporting Independence	0	226	236	236	
Total Housing Capital funded through Mainstream	1,500	2,726	2,736	2,736	
Funded through other sources					
Disabled Facilities Grant	1,219	1,351	1,215	1,215	
Regional Housing Pot	2,636	0	0	0	
New Growth Points	532	0	0	0	
Total Housing Capital Funded through Other Resources	4,387	1,351	1,215	1,215	
Total Housing Capital Programme	5,887	4,077	3,951	3,951	

The programme is kept under constant review throughout the year to ensure the delivery of capital priorities. It is scrutinised at a senior management level and regular reports are submitted to Cabinet detailing actual expenditure and outputs against the budget.

Revenue Resources

The estimate of revenue expenditure for the housing role of the council is detailed in Table 2. These estimates were derived from the budget approach highlighted within the context of this Section.

Table 2- Revenue Resources

Revenue estimates of housing expenditure	2010/11 £000's	2011/12 £000's	2012/13 £000's	2013/14 £000's
Housing Standards and Improvements	581	601	537	543
Housing Strategy & Partnerships	431	455	389	394
Supported Housing	662	867	805	813
Net budget	1,674	1,923	1,731	1,750

Other sources of funding

Strategic Housing receives grants from CLG that are targeted at delivering specific services such as Homelessness. Table 3 details our additional sources of funding.

Table 3 – Other sources of funding

	2010/11 £000's	2011/12 £000's	2012/13 £000's	2013/14 £000's
Income from RHP Loan	0	35	35	35
Homelessness Grant	80	140	140	140
Overcrowding Grant	80	75	75	0
Total Other Sources of Funding	160	250	250	175

Priorities	Action	Targets / dates	Partners
Value for Money	Examine opportunities for service improvement as part of transformational service reviews	March 2013	Walsall council
	Continually review our processes to ensure we are working effectively and efficiently	2016	Walsall council
	Continue to engage in benchmarking costs and quality	2016	Walsall council
	Continue to monitor customer satisfaction	2016	Walsall council

Chapter 8 – Implementation, Monitoring and Review

We want to deliver high quality cost effective services to our residents. We know robust comprehensive performance management is essential in delivering excellent services for everyone. Our Corporate Integrated Planning and Performance Framework (IPPF) ensure performance management is an important part of our daily work.

A key element of the framework is the Corporate Plan which sets out the council's vision for the borough, its aims and objectives, and key priorities for the year ahead. It contributes to and is influenced by Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership Sustainable Community Strategy.

The framework brings together a range of environmental, economic and demographic information together with customer feedback that influences the design and delivery of our services.

Monitoring and reviewing our performance is carried out at every level of financial, service and individual planning processes to ensure continuous improvement.

We also monitor our performance against a set of local housing performance indicators on a monthly basis and the results are reported to the strategic housing performance board quarterly. This continuous monitoring enables us to assess the effectiveness of our strategy, processes and procedures. It also enables us to identify and respond to changes in trends.

Additional Information

If you would like a further copy of this Housing Strategy or any of the above documents please contact us:

Housing Strategy and Partnerships

Walsall Council

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Walsall

WS1 1TP

Telephone: 01922 655413

Fax: 01922 652043

E-mail: housingstrategyandpartnerships@walsall.gov.uk

These documents are also available on the Housing Service page of the council's website www.walsall.gov.uk/housing as well as links to documents mentioned in these strategies.

Feedback Form

We would like to hear your views and suggestions. If you have any comments, please complete the response section below, detach it and send it the address above. Alternatively, e-mail housingstrategyandpartnerships@walsall.gov.uk

Comments

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Name

Address.....

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