

Strategic Theme 2: Improving Housing Quality

Improving the quality of the city's housing stock is a key challenge for the Leeds Housing Strategy. There are in excess of 322,000 housing units within the city, with approximately 248,000 of these units being privately owned. The 'Improving Housing Quality' strategic theme will focus on the challenge and actions required to improve the quality and sustainability of the Leeds housing stock. Maximising the proportion of stock that conforms to a prescribed standard of decency will be one element of this. All social landlords in the city have brought or are working towards bringing their housing stock up to the decency standard by 2010/11. The Leeds Housing Strategy will set out how this target will be achieved, and, perhaps more importantly, will consider options for longer-term investment in social housing stock. Specific reference will be made to the future management and investment options for council owned stock, which is managed by the three Leeds ALMOs and Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation.

The challenge relating to improving housing quality within the private sector is perhaps the most significant that is contained within the Leeds Housing Strategy, with 77% of housing stock being privately owned. There are limitations on the amount of new housing that can be developed, especially in the current economic climate, and the Leeds Housing Strategy recognises that housing need will be primarily addressed through the existing housing stock, with the main part of this being privately owned. Increasing the level of housing decency in the private sector is a key priority within the Leeds Housing Strategy.

The Leeds Private Sector Stock Condition Survey identified that 33% (81,800 properties) of private housing in the city fails to meet the decency standard, with this figure rising to over 70% for back-to-back housing. The 2004 Housing Act introduced a new system of risk assessing the condition/habitation of residential housing, Housing Health and Safety Ratings System (HHSRS), with Category 1 hazards defined as the most serious risk to an occupants' health and wellbeing. Properties that have Category 1 hazards cannot be defined as meeting the decency standard. The stock condition survey also identified that 13.8% (34,300 properties) have one or more Category 1 hazard, with this figure rising to 45% for back-to-back housing. The most common hazards in Leeds are excess cold, limited fire escape routes and increased risk of falls. The stock condition survey estimated that approximately 21,000 properties in the city suffer from excess cold. The challenges relating to back-to-back housing are largely unique to the West Yorkshire sub-region and are most acute in Leeds, given the number of such units (19,500) that are part of the Leeds housing stock.

Recent research has estimated that around two thirds of existing housing stock will still be in use in 2050. This point needs to be aligned to the calculation included in the Climate Change Plan for Yorkshire and Humber that 46% of the UK's total carbon emissions emanate from

property. The government has set targets that public buildings will be carbon neutral from 2018 and commercial buildings from 2019. These targets relate to a time period after the end of the Leeds Housing Strategy term. Nevertheless, the city needs to make a commitment to reduce greenhouse emissions and to achieve improved standards against the Code for Sustainable Homes in relation to existing housing stock. Improving the energy efficiency is a key action in the drive to promote the environmental sustainability of housing stock. Promoting energy efficiency will contribute to tackling the incidence of fuel poverty: where a household spends more than 10% of their household income on meeting energy costs. A 40% rise in energy costs over the last two years has led to an increase in the number of Leeds residents who are 'fuel poor', albeit that more vulnerable households, older or disabled people, BME households and families with children, are more likely to be in this position. The Council and other housing-related services have limited power to control energy prices, so the focus of the Leeds Housing Strategy will be on promoting energy efficiency measures as a means of reducing energy costs and eliminating excess cold.

The private rented sector will be an increasingly important housing option and a vibrant sector is needed to stimulate labour mobility and to attract job growth/investment into the city. This tenure option will be an increasingly important one for people in housing need, who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Leeds has a large and diverse private rented sector, which accommodates around 41,600 households and where the majority of property owners are committed to high standards of landlord practice and housing management. However, non-decency is higher (44%) than for the private sector as a whole. One of the reasons for this is that around 56% of such stock was built before 1919 and therefore is more likely to suffer from one or more hazard such as excess cold, limited fire escape routes and high risk of falls.

Vulnerable households are more likely to live in such housing or with landlords who do not apply or aspire to apply high standards of housing management practice. It is not feasible to comprehensively regulate property and landlord standards across a private rented sector comprising over 41,000 properties. Some tenants may be more reluctant to highlight issues relating to disrepair, given the limited security of tenure inherent in Assured Shorthold tenancies. The Leeds Housing Strategy will therefore set out how key services, such as the housing options service and supported housing sector, can play a more proactive role in highlighting, and taking action against, poor standards of landlordism. At the same time, landlords need to be confident that tenants are being given realistic advice and not remaining in properties, when it is in neither the tenants or landlords interest for them to do so. A key principle in the drive to improve standards within the private rented sector will be to see landlords, as well as tenants, as the customers of housing services. Encouraging more landlords to become

members of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme will be another key action.

The Council has estimated the cost of bringing all private housing up to a decent standard of repair at £250 million. Clearly, it is not realistic to assume that this level of funding could be secured through governmental grants. The Leeds Housing Strategy will set out plans to target intervention at the worst housing, which is occupied by the most vulnerable members of society, to use funding to lever in additional investment, especially from property owners and financial institutions, and to consider other innovative options to attract investment. The Leeds Housing Strategy has noted the example of Liverpool, where the local NHS Trust is investing £9 million into improving private housing conditions, because of the recognition of the link between improved standards of housing and enhanced health and wellbeing outcomes. A key action within the Leeds Housing Strategy will be to commission research to better calculate the wider benefits, especially from a health and wellbeing perspective that can be generated from improving housing conditions.

The links between housing conditions and health and wellbeing outcomes are evident, even in the absence of further research. Excess cold is a major cause of increased winter mortality, especially amongst older people. Older and disabled people are less likely to be able to function in back-to-back housing, with steep and narrow staircases a particular problem. This makes it more likely that people will need to move into residential care or will have a fall that results in a hospital admission. Living in poor housing conditions also has a negative impact upon a person's mental health and wellbeing. Children growing up in poor housing are less likely to thrive, to achieve in their education and other development, and to maximise their potential. NHS Leeds believes there is a strong correlation between the relatively high level of infant mortality that occurs in Leeds and family residence in poor housing conditions. The Leeds Housing Strategy has noted the work of Care and Repair Leeds (see case study Care and Repair Leeds) and the cost of carrying out minor adaptation work to prevent falls (£175), in comparison to the cost incurred by NHS Leeds to hospitalise a person who requires a hip replacement – approximately £50,000.

A survey of Leeds residents carried out as part of the formulation of the Leeds Strategic Plan identified that the quality of housing was one of the three main factors that influenced whether a neighbourhood was a good place to live. The 'Improving Housing Quality' theme will therefore significantly contribute to the Thriving Places strategic theme within the Leeds Strategic Plan. Improving the quality of housing will also contribute to strategic outcomes and improvement priorities included within the Environment strategic theme of the Strategic Plan, especially improving the quality and sustainability of housing and reducing carbon emissions. Good quality housing also contributes to promoting

harmonious communities and community cohesion, and investment in housing creates employment and stimulates the economy of Leeds.

The 'Improving Housing Quality' strategic theme includes the following key priorities:

- F. Bring all social housing up to the decency standard**
- G. Identify future investment options for council housing**
- H. Increase the number of private homes that meet the decency standard**
- I. Improve the long-term sustainability of private housing**
- J. Continue to improve standards in the private rented sector**
- K. Improve the standard of temporary accommodation leased through the private sector**

The 'Improving Housing Quality' theme will therefore contribute to a range of strategic outcomes and improvement priorities, set out within the Leeds Strategic Plan. These include:

| Theme | Strategic Outcome | Improvement Priority |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enterprise and the Economy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increased entrepreneurship and innovation through effective support to achieve full potential of people, businesses and the economy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase innovation and entrepreneurial activity across the city |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ An enhanced workforce that will meet future challenges through fulfilling individual and economic potential and investment in learning facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enhance the skill level of the workforce to fulfil individual and economic potential ■ Improve learning outcomes for all 16 year olds with a focus on narrowing the achievement gap ■ Increase the proportion of vulnerable groups engaged in education, training or employment |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cleaner, greener and more attractive city though effective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Address neighbourhood problem sites, improve |

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|--|---|---|
| | environmental management and changed behaviours | cleanliness, and access to, and the quality of, green spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improve the quality and sustainability of the built and natural environment |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Health and Wellbeing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reduced health inequalities through the promotion of healthy life choices and improved access to services ■ Improved quality of life through maximising the potential of vulnerable people by promoting independence, dignity and respect ■ Enhanced safety and support for vulnerable people through preventative and protective action to minimise risks and maximise wellbeing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase the number of decent homes ■ Reduce premature mortality in the most deprived areas ■ Increase the number of vulnerable people helped to live at home |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Thriving Places | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improved quality of life through mixed neighbourhoods offering good housing options and better access to services and activities ■ Increased economic activity through targeted support to reduce worklessness and poverty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase the number of decent homes ■ Reduce the number of people who are not able to adequately heat their homes ■ Increased financial inclusion in deprived areas |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Harmonious Communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improved community cohesion and integration through meaningful involvement and valuing equality and diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase the sense of belonging and pride in local neighbourhoods that help to build cohesive communities |

The 'Improving Housing Quality' theme also contributes to the following performance indicators, which are included within the National Indicator Set (highlighted in bold if also included in the Leeds Local Area Agreement):

- **NI120: Reduce premature mortality in the most deprived areas**
- **NI139: Older people helped to live at home**
- **NI141: Number of vulnerable people achieving independent living**
- **NI158: Percentage of non-decent Council homes**
- **NI187: Tackling fuel poverty**
- **NI188: Planning to adapt to climate change**
- NI2: Percentage of people who feel they belong to their neighbourhood
- NI119: Self reported measure of people's overall health and wellbeing
- NI156: Number of households living in temporary accommodation.

Strategic Priority F: Bringing all social housing up to the decency standard

Strategic Priority G: Identifying longer-term investment options for council housing

The government has set a target to bring all social housing (stock managed by local authorities, ALMOs and housing association) up to the decency standard by 2010/11. The Leeds ALMOs were able to secure £480 million in additional credits from government, following successful two star Audit Commission inspection results in 2004 and 2005. This funding has been used to part finance the decency programme and it is estimated that around £858 million will have been invested in improving the condition of council housing by the end of 2010/11. Local housing associations have financed decency programmes through a combination of private sector investment and organisational reserves.

Data held by the Homes and Communities Agency calculated Leeds housing association decency, as of June 2008, at 91.6%. The Council is forecasting that ALMO decency will be around 85% as of April 2009. The Council and the Leeds ALMOs are confident that the decency standard will be met by 2010/11.

Many social landlords have faced similar issues in striving to meet the decency standard, especially back-to-back units and the accompanying challenges relating to Category 1 hazards. Council secured decency funding can only be used to finance improvement to the interior and immediate exterior of a property and could not be used to demolish and replace obsolete stock. Private Finance Initiatives in areas of the city such as Swarcliffe have helped lever in additional investment to carry out decency work and to deliver new housing to replace obsolete stock.

The Leeds ALMOs have also looked at wider improvement work exceeding the decency standard, including improving energy efficiency by installing cavity wall and loft insulation.

Many social landlords, including the Leeds ALMOs, will achieve the decency target during the term of the Leeds Housing Strategy. However, the Leeds Housing Strategy very much views this forecasted achievement as being an important milestone, rather than an end in itself. Stock will need to be maintained post 2010/11 and properties will fall out of decency if investment is not maintained or enhanced. The expectations of tenants are rightfully evolving and increasing and it is essential that social landlords accept the challenge of meeting rising tenant expectations. All social landlords will be exploring opportunities to secure appropriate investment post 2010/11. This will entail quantifying the likely cost of ongoing investment, the balance between capital and planned investment, and identifying organisational and external resources that can be secured to finance investment. Many housing associations will have to consider longer-term investment options within the context of financial institutions adopting less favourable and more restrictive lending practices.

With regard to council housing, the Council's Executive Board has approved a recommendation to commence an options appraisal to consider investment options for stock post 2011. A number of drivers have been identified for carrying out this work. The Council acknowledges that stock condition will begin to deteriorate if ongoing investment is not secured. The Council is also looking beyond the decency standard and is looking to bring stock up to a higher level of repair. Improvement priorities, such as lift replacement and ongoing adaptations, which sit outside the parameters of decency work, will need to be financed and will become more pressing challenges in future years. At the time of writing (February 2009), the Council has not been notified as to whether it has been successful in securing additional investment to modernise sheltered housing. If this bid is not or only partly successful, then the Council will need to consider other options for investing in sheltered housing. It is forecast that the ALMOs will have around £50 million less for capital works in 2010/11 (£100 million per annum less than at the peak of the decency programme) and this will be insufficient to meet the priorities listed above.

Other events may also affect the outcome of the investment options appraisal. The Government is carrying out a review of HRA (Housing Revenue Account) funding arrangements. Currently, Leeds is obliged to transfer surplus income from the HRA to Central Government to subsidise other authorities. The HRA review may mean that surplus making authorities are able to retain all income, which could partly cover the costs of longer-term priorities. The 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act allows local authorities to pre-qualify with the Homes and Communities Agency funding as an approved recipient of grant. The Council is actively pursuing this option.

In addition, ALMOs that secure an excellent Audit Commission inspection rating can bid unilaterally for Homes and Communities Agency subsidy; with two star rated landlords able to bid as part of a consortia. The Leeds ALMOs were inspected in 2008, with Aire Valley Homes Leeds receiving a two star rating and West North West Homes Leeds and East North East Homes Leeds receiving a one star rating. The latter two ALMOs have opted to be re-inspected from September 2009 onwards and are hopeful that a two star rating can be attained.

| Key Actions |
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| 1. All social landlords to continue to deliver capital investment programmes to bring all managed housing stock up to the decency standard by the end of 2010/11. |
| 2. Social landlords to draw up investment strategies to cover investment requirements and opportunities once decency is met. |
| 3. Council to complete an options appraisal into the options for investing in council housing. |
| 4. Council to establish arrangements for involving council tenants in the options appraisal process. |
| 5. East North East Homes Leeds and West North West Homes Leeds to be subject to further Audit Commission inspection of housing management services. |
| 6. Council to consider the implications of the HRA review for the future management and investment in council housing. |
| 7. Council to pursue pre-qualification status with Homes and Communities Agency as an approved recipient of grant. |
| 8. All social landlords to develop Affordable Warmth Action Plans. |

| Key Targets | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Measure | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
| % of non-decent council housing (Maximum) NI158 | ? | 0 | 0 |
| % of non-decent housing association managed stock (Maximum) | ? | 0 | 0 |
| Proportion of social housing units achieving a SAP rating of 65 or higher (Minimum) | ? | ? | ? |
| % satisfaction of council tenants with landlord service (Minimum) NI160 (Indicator reported every two years) | 75% (2008/09) | 80% | 80% (2010/11) |
| % satisfaction of BME council tenants with landlord (Minimum) | | | |

Strategic Priority H: Increase the number of private homes that meet the decency standard

Strategic Priority I: Improve the long-term sustainability of private sector housing

The 2007 Leeds Private Sector Stock Condition Survey identified that 33% of privately owned housing in the city was non-decent. It has also been estimated that around two-thirds of current housing stock will still be in use in 2050. It is unlikely, especially in the current economic climate, that there will be significant programmes of new house building during the term of this and subsequent housing strategies. Addressing the deficiencies of current housing stock is crucial if much of the current stock is to remain a sustainable housing option. The main challenges, and likely cost, are in summary:

| Reason | Number of properties | % of total stock |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Category 1 Hazard | 34,300 | 13.8% |
| Repair | 27,100 | 10.9% |
| Amenities | 7,300 | 2.9% |
| Thermal Comfort | 51,400 | 20.7% |

| Reason | Total cost | Cost per dwelling |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Category 1 Hazard | £91 million | £2,800 |
| Repair | £44 million | £1,600 |
| Amenities | £40 million | £5,400 |
| Thermal comfort | £74 million | £1,400 |
| Total | £250 million | £3,100 |

The Leeds Housing Strategy recognises that the Council in isolation does not have the financial resources to address the private sector decency challenge. The actions set out in the Leeds Housing Strategy will be framed around developing strategic partnerships to identify priority challenges and joint investment opportunities. Intervention and investment will need to be targeted at the most vulnerable members of society, especially where that maximises outcomes for all strategic partners. Council and other partner funding needs to be the catalyst for promoting property owner investment in housing stock.

At the point of writing (February 2009), the Council's Environment and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board is carrying out an examination of the private sector housing challenge and the cost implications for the authority. The Council is

committed to establishing a Private Sector Housing Strategic Partnership Board, which will be chaired by the Executive Member for Environment and Neighbourhoods. The partnership board will also comprise senior officers from the housing authority, Homes and Communities Agency, Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber and NHS Leeds. The composition and purpose of the Private Sector Housing Strategic Partnership Board will mirror that of the Leeds Affordable Housing Strategic Partnership. The private sector housing partnership board will strive to identify joint strategic priorities and additional investment that can be used to deliver the outcomes required.

The inclusion of NHS Leeds on the private sector housing partnership board is critical to its effectiveness. The introduction to the 'Improving Housing Quality' strategic theme has highlighted the strong links between housing conditions and health and wellbeing outcomes. The Leeds Housing Strategy has noted the example of Liverpool where the local NHS Trust is investing £9 million in improving private sector housing conditions, on the basis that this will generate improvements in health and wellbeing for the people of Liverpool and therefore reduce need and costs across all aspects of the health service in the city. Nevertheless, it will be essential for the Council to establish the joint benefits that will be generated through such investment. The Council is planning to commission Sheffield Hallam University to carry out research, using an established and cross-disciplinary model, to establish the health and wellbeing benefits of improving housing conditions. It will also be important to study the Liverpool example and to identify whether the NHS Trust can demonstrate that there have been improvements in health and wellbeing that can be directly sourced back to the housing investment programme.

A strategic priority for NHS Leeds is to reduce the incidence of infant mortality in the city. There are 5.9 infant mortalities per 1000 births in comparison to the average for England and Wales of 4.9 deaths. There is a strong correlation between residence in the poorer areas of the city (Super Output Areas) and infant mortality, with the rate rising to 8% per 1000 live births for babies who are born to mothers resident in one of these areas. There is also a profound association between ethnicity and infant mortality with the rate being 9.6 for people of Pakistani origin and 9.8 for people of Afro-Caribbean origin. Such communities are more likely to live in deprived areas, with 92% of children born to Bangladeshi mothers living in one of the Super Output Areas. NHS Leeds believes that living in overcrowded and poor housing conditions is a major contributor to infant mortality. The Council has secured funding from the CLG to examine the causes and effects of overcrowding in the city and the link with infant mortality will be a key element of this work. The Council will also engage with NHS Leeds to identify how this joint challenge can be addressed.

In 2002, the government set a target for all housing authorities that a minimum of 70% of private housing occupied by vulnerable households (older people, people with a disability or other long-term life affecting illness, and families with children) would be brought up to the decency standard by the end of March 2010. This performance indicator/target was discontinued when the National Indicator Set was introduced at the beginning of 2008/09. Nevertheless, given the scale of the private sector housing challenge, an approach of targeted intervention and investment to assist the most vulnerable members of the Leeds population appears to be appropriate, especially if that generates wider health and wellbeing benefits. It is

currently estimated that 63% of private sector housing occupied by vulnerable households is decent.

The Council has more limited powers and resources to address private sector housing non-decency than in respect of council owned stock. The 2004 Housing Act permits local authorities to take enforcement action if Category 1 hazards are identified in a property. The most common Category 1 hazard is excess cold. Vulnerable households are more likely to live in housing suffering from excess cold and are less likely to be able to contend with the effects of these conditions. Excess cold disproportionately affects people with limited income to meet energy costs and exacerbates conditions, such as rheumatism, arthritis, bronchitis and cardiovascular illness, which older people are more likely to experience. Excess cold also exacerbates mobility problems and increases the risk of falls and other household accidents.

Tackling excess cold and fuel poverty in private housing is therefore one of the key actions within the Leeds Housing Strategy. Fuel poverty is defined as where a household needs to spend more than 10% of its income on heating a home to an acceptable standard. An acceptable standard is a temperature of 21 degrees centigrade in the main living areas. Leeds City Council published an Affordable Warmth Strategy in 2007 to cover the period up to 2016, with the strategy delivered through the Council's Fuelsavers Team.

A key action within the Affordable Warmth Strategy is to monitor trends relating to the incidence of fuel poverty in the city. There has been an increase from 19 to 24% in the period from 2007 to 2008 in the proportion of the Leeds population that are experiencing fuel poverty, an increase which can be largely attributed to the 40% increase in energy costs over the last two years. Fuel poverty disproportionately affects BME households: with 39% of Black and 30% of households of Asian origin spending more than 10% of income on energy costs¹. The Fuelsavers Team also monitor fuel poverty levels by council ward. In 2006, the five council wards with the highest proportion of private sector residents who declared that they were having difficulty heating their homes were as follows:

| Ward | Difficulty heating home (Total) | Difficulty heating home (Vulnerable) | Difficulty heating home (Non-Vulnerable) |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Gipton and Harehills | 51% | 14% | 65% |
| Hyde Park and Woodhouse | 21% | 37% | 59% |
| Killingbeck | 45% | 8% | 53% |
| Middleton Park | 38% | 14% | 52% |
| Burmantofts and Richmond Hill | 38% | 12% | 50% |

The five wards with the lowest incidence of fuel poverty were Adel and Wharfedale, Wetherby, Harewood, Roundhay and Horsforth.

¹ BME data needs to be treated with some caution given the limited number of survey returns made by households from BME communities.

The Council has limited powers to influence energy prices and therefore the focus of the Leeds Housing Strategy will be on action to promote energy efficiency as a means of reducing energy costs and eliminating excess cold. The Fuelsavers Team has run a number of initiatives, designed to tackle fuel poverty amongst the most vulnerable households, such as 'Health through Warmth' and 'Warm Front'. The Leeds Housing Strategy recommends that the Council look beyond these initiatives to turn Leeds into a 'Warm Zone' area. There are currently 13 'Warm Zone' areas in the UK, including one covering the Kirklees authority area.

Case Study: Warm Zones

Warm Zones give every household in the catchment area the opportunity to better insulate their homes and to make their homes warmer, reduce energy consumption and cost, reduce carbon emissions and to make a positive contribution to the environment. The scheme works on a ward-by-ward basis, by carrying out initial doorstep assessments and then more detailed surveys to establish the improvements required. All households are entitled to loft and cavity wall insulation, with households in fuel poverty, on income related benefits or occupying hard to treat homes offered improvements to heating systems. All households also receive benefit entitlement and energy efficiency advice.

Warm Fronts are part funded through governmental and EU funding, but it is anticipated that additional funding will be secured through the local authority, ALMOs and NHS Trust.

The Kirklees 'Warm Zone' covers the period 2007 to 2010. In February 2009, the scheme had achieved the following:

- 4760 homes fitted with loft insulation and 2485 with cavity wall insulation
- 11,500 homes given energy saving light bulbs
- Carbon monoxide monitors given to 17,277 households
- Created 76 full time equivalent jobs in carrying out insulation work

The existing neighbourhood analysis of fuel poverty rates will enable the Council to prioritise the delivery of the 'Warm Zone' in the council wards with the highest levels of fuel poverty. The establishment of a Leeds 'Warm Zone' would be dependent upon Council officers receiving approval from members and it will be important to demonstrate the wider health and wellbeing and employment benefits that could be generated through the initiative. The Council could also benefit by using the best practice developed through 'Warm Zone' initiatives in other areas, especially Kirklees. Reference could be made to the Kirklees scheme, specifically to how they are tackling issues associated with older housing stock. The Council has also commissioned the Building Research Establishment to carry out a study on how energy efficiency can be maximised in hard to treat properties. Back-to back housing is particularly difficult to treat as the hard external walls make it problematic

to carry out cavity wall insulation and the roof void, where insulation is placed, is often used as an attic room. The development of a 'Warm Zone' in Leeds will make a significant contribution to reducing greenhouse emissions emanating from housing stock and improving the rating of housing against the Code for Sustainable Homes.

The challenge of improving housing quality in relation to older housing stock, especially back-to-back housing is a key action within the Leeds Housing Strategy. There are approximately 19,500 back-to-back units in the city, with this housing form being almost unique to the West Yorkshire region and most prevalent in Leeds. The Council commissioned Re'new to develop a Back-to-Back Housing Strategy in 2008 and the Leeds Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey made significant reference to this housing form. Approximately 73% of back-to-back housing fails the decency standard, most commonly because of Category 1 hazards such as excess cold (difficulties associated with insulating properties), limited escape routes in event of fire (one door exit) and increased risk of falls (steep and narrow staircases). There are limitations on the action that can be taken to address these hazards, albeit that the findings of the Building Research Establishment work could inform future action.

Back-to-back housing is not a homogenous housing form and represents an attractive housing option for many people, especially as a starter home for younger, economically active people with no life affecting illnesses, who are able to contend with the property defects. However, around 62% of the housing form is concentrated in areas of the city, such as Harehills, Cross Green and Beeston, and this concentration exacerbates the deprivation, through high density living, high stock turnover and poor environmental conditions, in these areas. It is estimated that around 13,000 back-to-back units will still be in use in 2050 and it is important that the sustainability of these units is considered. Indeed, the Back-to-Back Housing Strategy makes the point that the housing form could remain an attractive housing option for many households, especially first time buyers, if a viable investment strategy was developed.

The Back-to-Back strategy estimated that around £377.9 million of funding would be required to replace, convert or refurbish the worst forms of back-to-back housing in the city over the next 25 years. This equates to around £15.1 million per annum and assumes government funding of around £1.9 million per year, which would lever in around £13.4 million of private sector investment. The uniqueness of the back-to-back housing form to the West Yorkshire region could represent a strong argument to secure additional investment through the Homes and Communities Agency. It is debatable whether a model based upon generating private sector investment of approximately 90% of total cost is viable in the current economic climate. An action plan, including investment submissions to the Homes and Communities Agency, will need to be drawn up.

Clearance of obsolete housing stock and group repair schemes are key elements of existing programmes to address poor quality housing. The Council receives funding through the Regional Housing Board to acquire and clear obsolete stock. The land released through this work is being placed in the Affordable Housing Strategic Partnership portfolio for development. The Regional Housing Board funding is also used to finance group repair work, in the Beeston Hill and Burley Lodge areas,

improving the external fabric of properties. The Council is considering the feasibility of seeking an additional £20 million through the Homes and Communities Agency to extend the group repair programmes.

The Council will continue to provide options such as Home Improvement Equity Loans to encourage property owners to bring housing stock up to the decency standard.

Case Study: Home Improvement Equity Loans

Homeowners in Leeds are entitled to apply for an equity loan of up to 30% to make improvements to their properties. The loan option is part of the regional scheme that is administered by Sheffield City Council for the Yorkshire and Humber region. A key criteria of a loan being agreed is that the property must be of a decent standard upon completion of improvement work. The Council helps to steer the improvement work to ensure that the loan is used for the right purpose and the decency standard is met. Once properties are sold in the future, the percentage of the sale price relating to the original loan is paid back to the Council with proceeds being recycled back into the service, enabling it to become self-sustaining.

Key Actions

1. Establish a Private Sector Housing Strategy Partnership Board
2. Commission Sheffield Hallam University to establish health and wellbeing benefits of housing improvement programmes
3. Study Liverpool model and identify health and wellbeing benefits generated through housing investment
4. The Council and NHS Leeds to develop a joint strategic approach to reducing the rate of infant mortality in the city
5. Draw up a business plan in 2009/10 setting out the rationale for establishing a 'Warm Zone' in Leeds
6. Secure member and other investment partner support for establishment of 'Warm Zone' in Leeds
7. Identify delivery partners to provide 'Warm Zone' through a procurement process
8. Identify best practice from other 'Warm Zones' including identifying direct benefits to health and wellbeing levels generated through these initiatives
9. Implement 'Warm Zone' in Leeds from beginning of 2010/11 with initial focus on five wards with highest levels of fuel poverty
9. Reduce the number of Older People living in fuel poverty. Providing services and customer care to enable Older People to take-up and benefit from the energy advice service.
10. Reduce the number of BME people living in fuel poverty. Providing services and customer care to enable BME people to take-up and benefit from the energy advice service.
10. Develop back-to-back housing action plan, targeting intervention

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| on identified units and determining type of intervention required. |
| 11. Develop investment proposals to Homes and Communities Agency to tackle the back-to-back challenge, including realistic assumption of private sector investment that can be levered in. |
| 12. Identify feasibility of securing Homes and Community Agency funding to expand existing group repair programmes |
| 13. Increase take-up of Home Improvement Equity Loan option |
| 14. Target BME people and older people for Home Improvement Loan option through raising awareness and take up. |

| Key Targets | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Measure | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
| Number of private sector properties made decent (Minimum) | | | |
| % of Leeds residents receiving income based benefits living in housing with low energy efficiency rating – below SAP rating of 35 (Maximum) NI187 | | | |
| % of private properties with SAP rating of 65 or above | | | |
| Per capita reduction in CO ₂ emissions in the Leeds area | | | |
| Number of Leeds households receiving energy efficiency grants or loans | | | |
| Number of Leeds households taking up offer of Home Improvement Loan | | | |

Strategic Priority 10: Continue to improve standards in the private-rented sector

Leeds has a diverse private rented sector, comprising 41,660 dwellings (13% of total stock) and a number of different markets: new build in the city centre, traditional student provision in the north-west of the city and older self-contained or multiply occupied housing in the inner urban areas. The private rented sector plays a vital role in the Leeds 'housing ladder', it is the tenure of choice for many people and will be an increasingly important housing option over the term of the Leeds Housing Strategy. One of the key attributes of the private rented is its flexibility, adaptability and ease of access in comparison to other tenures. The private rented sector has been identified over a long period of time as a tenure that can facilitate labour mobility and therefore will play a critical role in the forecast employment growth in the Leeds district. The private rented sector also contains many landlords who pride themselves on offering high quality housing and excellent standards of housing management.

Despite the many vibrant aspects of the private rented sector, it does contain the highest proportion of poor housing, with approximately 44% of stock (18,330 properties) failing the decency standard. This compares unfavourably to ALMO managed housing (forecast that 15% will be non-decent by the end of 2008/09) and

the owner-occupied sector, which has a non-decent rate of 31%. Approximately, 56% of privately rented housing was built before 1919 (compared to 20% of owner-occupied stock) and therefore is more likely to suffer from difficult to treat Category 1 hazards of excess cold, limited fire escape routes and high risk of falls. The worst forms of private rented housing are concentrated, albeit not exclusively, in Beeston, Cross Green and Harehills. A significant proportion of the back-to-back housing form is incorporated within the private rented housing market. The private rented sector also contains a number of landlords who offer poor quality housing and management and charge rent that do not equate to the standard of service provided.

The proposals for action set out in the strategic priorities to improve private sector housing decency and sustainability, especially those relating to developing viable investment strategies; also apply to the challenge of continuing to improve standards in the private rented sector. The Leeds Housing Strategy will set out plans to use enforcement action and to promote self-regulation as a means of improving standards. The contraction in the availability of social housing and more limited access to home-ownership means that the private rented sector will be an increasingly important housing option, especially for people who are in some form of acute housing need. The Leeds Housing Strategy needs to embrace the opportunities that the private rented sector provides, and this includes housing services viewing private landlords as customers. Housing services, especially within the Council, need to examine current service practice, to identify whether it creates an unnecessary deterrent to property owners letting and investing in their stock.

The Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme is a key component of the drive to promote self-regulation and drive up standards of landlordism within the private rented market. The scheme is administered through the Council. Accredited landlords are obliged to ensure that their properties conform to a high standard of repair and maintenance and do not contain hazards that would be prejudicial to the health and wellbeing of tenants or their visitors. Landlords are also required to comply with legal obligations in relation to property and tenancy management. Property inspections are carried out as part of the scheme acceptance process to ensure that it conforms to the necessary standards of repair and maintenance. Property improvement plans are drawn up if stock fails to comply with the required standard. Landlords benefit from membership of the scheme through the dissemination of good practice from other landlords and the provision of advice from Council officers. Membership of the scheme may make them more attractive to prospective tenants as a reputable landlord. Accredited landlords also benefit from a range of concessions relating to the removal of household waste.

The Leeds Landlord Accreditation scheme had 404 landlord members as of 1 February 2009, covering 18,501 bedspaces. Member landlords tend, albeit not exclusively, to have housing stock concentrated in the north west of the city. This means that accreditation is not necessarily covering private-rented housing located in the inner urban areas of the city, which is more likely to be non-decent and contain Category 1 hazards. The Council has set a target to increase the number of accredited bedspaces to 20,000 by the end of 2009/10. The Council is investigating the feasibility of establishing a Managing Agents scheme in the city. It is envisaged that such developments could increase the number of accredited bedspaces to around 80%. The Council has also noted the call from many accredited landlords to

establish a tenant referencing scheme in the city. Middlesbrough has a good example of a tenant-referencing scheme that could be a blueprint for a Leeds scheme.

Middlesbrough Shield Project

The project provides a service to landlords, encouraging them to adopt good management practices and to end the cycle of inappropriate housing of anti social tenants. Credit and police checks are carried out and the project stays in contact with the landlord throughout the duration of tenancies. This scheme is self-financing as landlords pay a fee for the scheme to carry out the checks on their behalf. The Shield Project also offers a range of services to landlords free of charge.

Landlord feedback has also suggested that increasing the range of waste disposal concessions to include items such as mattresses, beds, sofas, carpets and construction waste could encourage landlords to join the accreditation scheme.

Property licensing is a key element of the enforcement programme to drive up standards in the private rented sector. The 2004 Housing Act requires that Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) be subject to licensing through the Council. HMOs tend to represent a poorer form of housing provision than self-contained units, especially in relation to fire safety standards, overcrowding, inadequate facilities and poor housing management. The licensing process will enable the Council to ensure that property standards conform to a reasonable standard for occupation, including landlords being obliged to address Category 1 hazards. Properties will need to comply with minimum standards in relation to the number of washing, cooking and toilet facilities and the property owner/manager will need to demonstrate that they are a fit and proper person to let out housing. Licensed landlords can potentially benefit from the initiative, as they can demonstrate that they are providing a better service than unlicensed landlords. The Leeds Private Sector Stock Condition Survey estimated that there were 6,600 HMO bedspaces in the city. Approximately 2,500 HMO bed spaces had been licensed by the end of February 2009, and the Council is committed to licensing all units by the end of the new Leeds Housing Strategy term. The 2004 Housing Act also enables local authorities to carry out selective licensing on private sector housing situated in areas characterised by poor quality housing, low demand, poor management standards and persistent anti-social behaviour. The Council is intending to introduce selective licensing in the Cross Green/East End Park area by the end of 2008/09, which will cover around 400 properties.

The Council's reconfigured housing options services will have a key role in improving standards in the private rented sector. The private sector lettings service, which sits within the housing options service, is currently working with 103 accredited landlords to offer assured shorthold tenancies as a homeless prevention option. Housing stock used is predominantly within the inner urban areas and therefore the scheme is contributing towards increasing the number of accredited landlords operating outside the north west area of the city. Property inspections are carried out as standard and this differs from the existing Landlord Accreditation Scheme, which does not inspect every property in a landlord's portfolio. The service carries out a range of checks on tenants prior to putting them forward to landlords as prospective

tenant, and this represents a prototype for a city-wide tenant referencing scheme. Housing options workers also negotiate rental charges below the Local Housing Allowance cap to a level that reflects the quality and location of the housing provided.

Reviewing how the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is operating is another priority action in relation to improving standards within the private rented sector. There is anecdotal evidence that landlords are pushing rental charges up to the LHA cap and that rental charges can be the same in low demand as in high demand areas for properties that are let to people on benefits. It is believed that the LHA could be distorting the link between rental charge and housing quality. The LHA rates apply to the city as a whole and the Housing Strategy would recommend that consideration is given to establishing a more localised approach to the LHA.

The housing options service will need to provide proactive housing advice to both tenants and landlords on tenancy law relating to repair obligations and possession proceedings. Officers from the housing options service should, wherever possible, negotiate with both parties to identify whether a resolution can be achieved that enables the tenant to remain living in the accommodation, provided it is in a reasonable condition. Tenants are entitled to remain in a private rented property for the duration of the fixed period of a tenancy and for a further notice period of two months. It is not appropriate to advise tenants to remain in a property, after the expiry of a notice period, until a bailiff warrant for possession has been executed. The Council does not have policies requiring this advice to be given, but have noted concerns raised by landlords and can make a commitment that no such advice will occur in future. The Leeds Housing Strategy also recognises that providers of floating housing support often work with vulnerable people who are accommodated in poor standards of private rented housing. Such service providers have a vital role in alerting Council enforcement and advice services to poor standards of accommodation and landlord practice in the private rented sector.

| Key Actions |
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| 1. Update the existing Private Rented Housing Strategy |
| 2. Develop viable investment strategies to address the worst forms of private rented housing in the city |
| 3. Encourage landlords to become members of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme, especially those with stock located in the inner urban areas of the city |
| 4. Identify further benefits that can be offered to accredited landlords to encourage membership |
| 5. Investigate the feasibility of establishing an Accredited Managing Agents scheme |
| 6. Consider the feasibility of establishing a Tenant Reference scheme across the city or regionally |
| 7. Continue to operate mandatory HMO licensing across the city |
| 8. Introduce selective licensing in the Cross Green and East End Park areas of the city |
| 9. Continue to develop the private sector lettings scheme through the reconfigured housing options service |
| 10. Consider the feasibility of adopting locality based LHA benefit |

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| caps rather than one for the city |
| 11. Improve standards of housing advice given to landlords and tenants through the reconfigured housing options service including encouraging membership of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation scheme |

| Key Targets | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Measure | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
| Number of private sector properties made decent. | | | |
| Number of bed spaces accredited under the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme (Minimum) | 20,000 | | |
| Number of licensed HMO bedspaces (Minimum) | | | |
| Number of houses subject to selective licensing | | | |
| Number of private sector lettings made through the housing options service | 720 | 760 | 800 |
| Number of homeless preventions relating to tenants being able to remain indefinitely in private rented tenancy (Minimum) | | | |

Strategic Priority 11: Improve the standard of temporary accommodation leased through the private sector

Demand for temporary accommodation is such that provision commissioned through the Supporting People programme (hostels, refuges and other supported self-contained accommodation) is insufficient to meet demand. The Council currently has a contract with three private sector providers who supply additional units of temporary accommodation. In February 2009, there were approximately 223 households accommodated with the private providers, with around 180 of these being families with dependent children. The Council is committed to reducing temporary accommodation placements to no more than 260 households per night by the end of March 2010, which would include no more than 100 households placed with private providers.

The contract with the private providers expires at the end of 2009 and the Council is currently developing a specification to re-tender the service. The Council is aware that there are significant concerns regarding the quality of housing provided by the current contractors. The tender specification will place a significant emphasis on the quality of housing provided, with at least 60% of the tender score relating to quality submissions. The following conditions will be set out within the tender specification.

- The successful contractor(s) will be members of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme

- All properties that will be used a temporary accommodation must be owned by the contractor and therefore subject to assessment under the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme
- The contractor(s) will be required to carry out a Housing Health and Safety Rating System assessment for each property used in the contract
- It will not be permissible to use properties with Category 1 hazards or in serious disrepair until these are addressed
- HMO units are not suitable for couples
- Gas safety checks must be carried out annual and electrical safety checks at least every five years
- Back-to-Back housing should only be used in exceptional circumstances and then only when it conforms to the Council’s guidance on fire safety principles in residential accommodation
- Ventilation in kitchens and bathrooms should conform with Building Regulations

Customers are able to request a statutory review if they believe that the temporary accommodation they have been allocated is unsuitable. The Council will need to strengthen the use of the statutory review process to identify and address poor standards of temporary accommodation. It will also be important for supported housing providers to use the statutory review process to highlight poor standards of temporary accommodation given to households who are being provided with support.

| Actions |
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| 1. Re-tender the current private sector temporary accommodation contract by the end of December 2009 |
| 2. New service contract to include a range of housing standard conditions |
| 3. Use the statutory review process to identify and address poor standards of accommodation |
| 4. Service contracts to include penalty conditions relating to poor standards of accommodation |
| 5. Develop contingency plan to ensure contractual capacity is maintained in the event of Council terminating arrangements with particular provider |