

Leeds Housing Strategy 2015-2018
Theme 2: Improving Housing Quality

Priority 2.1: Improve Existing Housing Quality

The Council and local Housing Associations have invested significantly in the city's social housing stock over the last 10 years and 96% of properties meet the decency standard. The Council is planning to invest approximately £90m per year from 2015 to 2024 to maintain standards of decency in council housing. The Affordable Housing section includes detail of the 'Leeds Standard', which new council house building will need to meet, and which is over and above the criteria of the Decency standard. It is intended in the future that the Council will apply the 'Leeds Standard' to the maintenance of existing council housing stock as well as new build. Improving the quality of housing in the private sector is a key challenge of the Housing Strategy. Back in 2007, it was estimated that 44% (about 18,000 properties) of privately rented housing failed to meet decency standard. The poorest quality housing is often that built before 1919 such as back to back properties. The Council's approach to tackling poor housing standards in the private sector is two-fold: targeted inspection and regulation of the poor housing. These principles are embodied in the Leeds Neighbourhood Approach. The Council is engaging with landlord representative groups such as the Residential Landlord Association. The Council also wants to encourage landlords to join the Leeds Accreditation Scheme and is helping to set up for local landlord forums.

Housing Quality Actions

- Continue to invest in council housing improvements over the term of the Housing Strategy
- Increase membership of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme
- Promote engagement with private landlords in the city
- Continue to roll out the Leeds Neighbourhood Approach (LNA) to improve private housing standards in the city
- Develop a private rented tenant involvement strategy for the city
- Work with government and landlord groups to develop improvement strategies for the private rented sector

| Housing Quality Targets | Baseline Position |
|---|--|
| Delivery of agreed capital programme. | 2014/15 capital programme currently predicted to out-turn at £57m. |
| Double the number of member landlords over the term of the Strategy | Current membership is 251 which a decrease from the end of 2013/14 |
| Establish 4 local private landlord forums | A local forum has commenced in Holbeck to support the LNA in the area. A forum has been created in Burley which will have its first meeting in April 2015. |
| Roll out LNA to a new area every quarter | 5 areas have been established. The Nowell scheme has come to an end with an exit strategy being implemented. All others will come to an end in the first 6 months of 2015/6. Holbeck will be up and running and the next area being considered for the commencement in the autumn. Funding has been agreed for the next 2 years subject to the return of 138 long term empty homes per annum. |
| Private Rented Tenant involvement Strategy developed by 2018 | To work to develop a strategy by 2018 |
| Development of a co-regulation strategy by 2018 | Discussions are ongoing to look at co-regulation with partners as an option for the improvement of standards in sector. |

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Case Study: Leeds Neighbourhood Approach

The Council, in partnership with a number of other agencies, inspected 126 properties on the collective Nowell streets in East Leeds – 44 of the 127 properties were empty at the time of inspection. Programmes of improvement were agreed with property owners and this has resulted in 440 hazards being removed. 33 of the 44 empty properties have been brought back into use. A series of community action days, involving Council officers, partners and residents, have taken place to further improve the locality.

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Priority 2.2: Energy Efficiency

The two elements of the fuel poverty definition are the cost of energy and household income. The Council has limited capacity to control these two variables and therefore the approach is focused on improving the energy efficiency of housing. The 'Leeds Standard' sets out high standards of energy efficiency for new housing. It is hoped that heat generated by the Veolia Incinerator can be piped to the city centre to create 'District Heating' systems including in council housing. The targeted approach, reflected in the Leeds Neighbourhood Approach, will serve to eliminate housing hazards including excess cold. There are a number of national and local initiatives, including Warm Homes, Green Doctor and Green Deal, to help vulnerable people improve the energy efficiency of their homes including through grant assistance.

Housing Quality Actions

- Deliver high quality programme of energy advice and improvements
- Target selected private rented to eliminate excess cold hazards
- Develop District Heat Plans
- Carry out a procurement exercise to deliver an energy efficiency improvement across the Leeds City Region
- Look at the feasibility of applying the 'Leeds Standard' to existing council housing

Housing Quality Targets

350 households provided with assistance by the Green Doctor per annum

Performance against individual excess cold project plans

Performance as per District Heating project plan

Agreed energy efficiency delivery plan for the city

Future capital investment in council housing made to Leeds Homes Refurbishment Standard wherever practical.

Baseline Position

Currently providing advice to 350 properties per annum.

Performance against individual project plans

To provide it to 2000 homes subject technical report

684 private homes in Leeds receive significant energy improvements in 2015/6

Previous investment largely made to Decent Homes standard.

Case Study: Warm Homes and Green Doctor

The Care and Repair Warm Homes initiative helps people with long-term health problems, exacerbated by poor private housing, who have limited income with heating system repairs and home insulation. The service aims to help 350 people per year. The Green Doctor service, run by Groundwork Leeds, helps people with energy advice and improvements including energy efficient light bulbs, pipe lagging and draught proofing. The service aims to visit 350 homes and make 240 improvements.

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Priority 2.3: Empty Homes

Minimising the number of empty homes, especially long-term voids, is key to making best use of housing stock in the city. A long-term empty property is one that has been unoccupied for at least 6 months. Empty properties can bring blight to localities given that they can become a target for vandalism and anti-social behaviour. The city has been successful in reducing the number of empty properties over the last four years. Actions include charging 100% Council Tax on empty properties, enforcement action when property owners do not work with the Council to bring homes back into use and providing loans to carry out improvements that may have prevented properties being used. The Leeds Neighbourhood Approach, beginning on the Nowell streets in East Leeds, has been successful in bringing empty homes back into use and raising housing quality standards. The Council wants this model to be further rolled out across the city. The Council has worked with the 'Leeds Empties' Social Enterprise which engages with long-term empty property owners to try and find bespoke solutions to bringing properties back into use. Working with landlord representative groups is another key element of the empty homes reduction programme. The Council, as part of the Council Housing Growth programme, is seeking to purchase up to 100 long-term empty homes and bring back into use as council housing. This initiative is being funded through Council resources supplemented by Homes and Communities Agency grant funding. The Council is exploring the feasibility of working with investment partners to purchase empty homes and use rental income to cover purchase/improvement costs. One option would be for such properties to become council housing once the purchase/improvement costs have been covered.

Housing Quality Actions

- Maximise number of empty homes brought back into use through a range of interventions
- Bring empty homes back into use through the Council Housing growth programme
- Further develop relationships with 'Leeds Empties' and landlord representative groups

Housing Quality Targets

Return 3200 empty homes to use every year
 Achieve a net reduction of 400 long term empty homes per year
 100 long term properties purchased by council by March 2018.
 60 long term empty homes returned by Leeds Empties in 2015/6

Baseline Position

In 2013/4 3124 long term empty homes were returned to use, slightly missing the 3200 target. However there was a net reduction of 580 against the 400 target.
 18 long term empty RTB properties have been purchased and returned to council stock. A further 3 will be completed by the end of the programme.
 Both centres to be complete by March 15
 Leeds Empties have target of 50 empty properties to be returned in 2014/15. At the end of Q3 they have returned 35.

Case Study: 65 Mexborough Place

65 Mexborough Place is a semi-detached house in Leeds 7 that had been empty since 2001. The Council sought to encourage the property owner to carry out improvements and bring the property back in to use. The slow progress of this work led the Council to initiate Compulsory Purchase procedures. The property owner subsequently took more proactive action to improve the property and it was re-occupied in December 2010.

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Priority 2.4: Student Housing

Leeds is a thriving university city with the student population forecast to plateau at approximately 58-59k in 2018. There has been a significant shift in student housing choice in recent years from the use of sharing housing in the Hyde Park/Headingley areas to purpose built flatted accommodation surrounding the city centre/Universities. The purpose built accommodation has generally been completed to a high standard and the traditional student housing options are often not of a comparable standard. Research carried out by local third sector organisation Re’new has forecast that there could be a surplus of over 5,700 student housing units in the city by mid-2016.

In practical terms, this will mean under-occupancy of shared housing or an increase in empty properties. The Council is committed to working with the Universities, landlords and tenants to raise standards in the traditional student housing options. The Council is able to licence Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) that are over three storeys in height or have five or more occupants. There are currently 2,500 HMO licences, with five year terms, in place combined with a rolling programme of property inspection. Issues such as ‘tired’ looking properties and poorly maintained gardens are not covered under the legal licensing provisions and the Council will continue to work with landlords, students and the Universities to improve the current position.

The Council is being flexible to respond to the risk of under-occupancy/empty homes relating to traditional student housing stock. In 2012, the Council removed the option of converting a self-contained property to an HMO through the ‘permitted development’ planning regulation. On a case by case basis, this provision can be changed if a need for conversion is established. The Council has a strong partnership with the Universities and supports the work of the Unipol student housing organisation in its management of its own accreditation scheme that again seeks to raise standards of accommodation and management.

Housing Quality Actions

- Deliver a rolling programme of licensed HMO inspections
- Work with property owners to deliver improvements required
- Work with the Universities and landlords regarding the changing use of student housing
- Oversee progress in implementing the report recommendations of the Student Accommodation Working Group
- Work with landlords to improve housing conditions not covered by the statutory framework

Housing Quality Targets

- 500 property inspections per year
- Delivery of the HIA programme
- Action plan agreed by student housing working group
- Student Housing action plan agreed with specific performance targets
- Development of a co-regulation strategy by 2018

Baseline Position

- On target to complete 500 licence compliance inspections in 2014/5.
- Various initiatives on target for delivery across all programmes of work
- Working group completed its investigation and action plan produced and agreed by the Council and partners
- Action Plan agreed and implemented
- Discussions are ongoing to look at co-regulation with partners as an option for the improvement of standards in sector.