



**North West Leicestershire
Housing Strategy
2016 - 2021**

Draft February 2016

Contents:

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction from Portfolio Holder
3. Purpose and context
4. National Context
5. Local strategic overview
6. Key achievements
7. Our Ambitions
8. Housing strategy 2016 – 2021 themes and objectives
9. Five year plan
10. Ownership and monitoring
11. Glossary

1. Executive summary

Home is one of the most important factors in people's lives. Good quality housing that meets the needs of residents helps to promote healthy and fulfilled lives, and an increased sense of wellbeing and belonging. Our corporate vision for the district is that:

North West Leicestershire is a place where people and businesses feel they belong and are proud to call home.

This revised North West Leicestershire Housing Strategy 2016 – 2021 builds on the work of the previous strategy, and taking into account national and local factors, focuses on how the district council and the North West Leicestershire Strategic Housing Partnership (the partnership) can work together to provide the best homes and housing related support for our residents.

The partnership also recognises that sustainable, inclusive communities are vital to promote economic growth, improve health and well-being, and create a sense of pride and belonging for residents. A focus on strong communities underpins this strategy and the identified themes, priorities and outcomes for the next 5 years.

Themes and proposed aims for the Housing Strategy 2016-2021

1 Supply –

- Maintain and increase supply of good quality new homes of all tenures to support economic growth in the district having regard to potential health impacts
- Maintain and increase the supply of affordable homes, in a challenging financial environment, including the construction and acquisition of new affordable homes by North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC)
- Work with developers to provide the best mix of housing types including starter homes, identified as a government initiative in the autumn budget 2015
- The council, affordable housing providers and housing developers to collaborate on addressing financial challenges in maintaining stock, and delivering new homes in order to meet growing demand from the housing register
- Unlock the potential of vacant sites and empty homes by working with private and public landlords and owners to bring empty homes back into use
- Make best use of existing council homes, including selective asset disposals where necessary to re-invest proceeds and converting empty council homes to provide alternative accommodation that meets local housing needs
- Update the affordable housing supplementary planning document to allow a more flexible application of affordable housing obligations through planning to facilitate a broader range of measures to maintain delivery
- Use lettings plans, including on a localised basis, to promote community cohesion, including the integration of new residents into existing communities

2 Standards –

- Improve the condition and energy efficiency of council homes through maintaining decency standards, and raising them where possible
- Support and implement schemes for low level handyman work that prevents accidents or injuries to residents or avoids more expensive future maintenance work
- Explore provision of life-time homes on new developments
- Commission a stock condition survey of private rented sector and owner occupied homes to establish up to date information about these sectors and inform what, and where, action is needed
- Work with private landlords and home owners to improve the condition of private homes, making them more suitable for vulnerable groups, including the frail elderly
- Continue the council's Green and Decent Homes energy efficiency projects and make an informed decision regarding future suitability for tenants in council homes
- Work with developers and partners to ensure community facilities and open spaces are maintained to a high standard
- Promote high quality internal and external design for new affordable homes

3 Support –

- Reduce fuel poverty across all tenures
- Prevent homelessness by giving timely advice and assistance to high risk groups
- Provide tenancy support to vulnerable groups
- Support those affected by welfare, health and social care reforms and encourage them to adapt to the changes
- Improve the understanding of the range of housing options and housing related support that are available
- Work with our ageing population to ascertain the type and location of housing they require
- Promote inclusion and cohesion by consulting with and involving local residents in community issues and initiatives
- Work with partners to implement the guidance of the Care Act 2014 which states that "Developing a local approach to preventative support should include the involvement of those responsible for public health, leisure, transport and housing services"

2. Introduction by Councillor Roger Bayliss, Portfolio Holder for Housing

The North West Leicestershire Housing Strategy for 2016 – 2021 describes how we intend to meet the current, and future, housing needs and aspirations of our residents. The strategy has been developed by the North West Leicestershire Strategic Housing Partnership (the partnership), a group that brings together a wide range of organisations across North West Leicestershire (NWL) who are committed to improving housing conditions and expanding the range of housing options for residents.

This strategy is being developed at a time when there is significant national change to housing policy and welfare reform is being implemented. We must plan for our housing future within this context, whilst focusing on the needs of our residents, paying particular regard to the ageing population in NWL and the additional challenges that this brings for services.

We have identified three themes:

- supply – making sure we have enough of the right type of homes;
- standards – that these homes are of a suitable quality and sustainable; and
- support –making additional support available to all those who need it.

Increasing recognition is now being given to the links between housing, health and well-being. In developing this strategy, we have undertaken a health impact assessment in conjunction with partners from public health, to identify where our strategic priorities have a direct impact on the health of residents. The implementation of this strategy will aim to maximise positive health impacts on our local communities.

Delivery of this housing strategy will be overseen by the partnership. We know that we can achieve more by working together and we will strive to deliver our common vision of building sustainable communities for the benefit of all residents in North West Leicestershire.

3. Purpose and context of the housing strategy

Our Housing Strategy for 2016 - 2021 is for every household living in the district whether they are an owner-occupier, living in a social housing, renting privately or homeless. It describes how the council and the partnership intend to meet the housing needs and aspirations of our residents over the next five years. It links to the Local Plan in setting out how to work together in new homes delivery and provision of housing services.

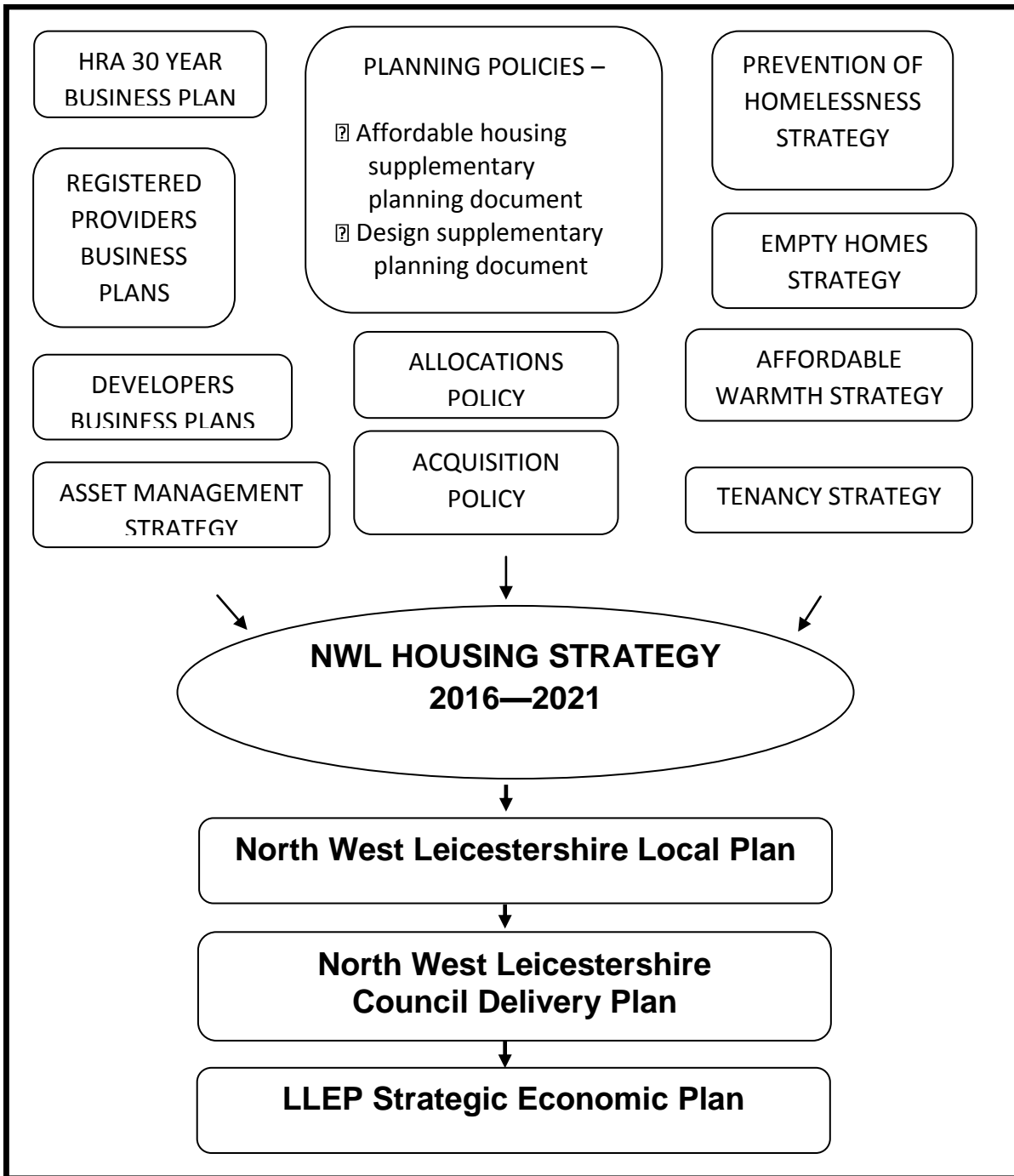
We have listened to our partners and local people to identify the housing needs that matter most and set out our priorities for action that will make a real difference to residents' lives and have a positive impact on the district.

The strategy links into the vision of the Leicester and Leicestershire Economic Partnership (LLEP) Strategic Economic Plan in which the Coalville Growth Corridor is identified as one of five growth areas in Leicestershire and will receive priority for infrastructure investment to unlock key development sites and improve connectivity. The Plan is structured on 3 themes - place, business and people and when planning new housing and development in the district, we need to ensure that communities have sustainable employment opportunities.

The new housing strategy sets out how the council and its partners will work together to address housing pressures in NWL and aim to bring inward investment to the district through leveraging in funding for the authority and its partners.

The housing strategy supports the Local Plan which is in the process of being developed for publication in 2017. The Local Plan for NWL is a strategic document which pulls together the current and future profile of the area and considers where forward investment and improvements to infrastructure need to be made. The document considers the economic, health and social needs of residents of the district along with environmental factors, and sets out a plan to enable the right sort of growth. Potential residential development is identified and planning guidance is drawn up to reflect the tenure and mix which will be required across the district in the future.

The following diagram outlines some of the related policies and strategies that feed into the Housing Strategy. *For explanations of policy/strategy please see section 11 Glossary.*



4. The National Context

Since our last strategy was published in 2011, there has been significant change in the planning system, the economy and the funding and delivery of affordable housing.

National housing strategy

The Government's housing strategy "Laying the Foundations", published in 2011, set out a clear agenda to boost the economy by stimulating the housing market through building new homes. The strategy set out a range of measures including the change to funding of affordable housing, requirements in relation to design, quality and improved environmental standards of new and existing homes; making best use of existing stock (including empty homes), and the discretion for housing providers to introduce fixed term social housing tenancies.

The National Planning Policy Framework

In 2012, the Government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which aimed to reduce the amount of planning guidance and simplify the planning process. The NPPF signalled a shift in emphasis towards a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The NPPF requires councils to identify the full, objectively assessed need for market and affordable homes in the housing market area and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. The NPPF makes it clear that government policy is to significantly boost the supply of housing. The NPPF also sets a definition of affordable housing for planning purposes as follows:

Affordable housing is social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Affordable housing should include provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.

Affordable housing includes -

Social rented housing - owned by local authorities and private registered providers (as defined in section 80 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008), for which guideline target rents are determined through the national rent regime. It may also be owned by other persons and provided under equivalent rental arrangements to the above, as agreed with the local authority or with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

Affordable rented housing - let by local authorities or private registered providers of social housing to households who are eligible for social rented housing. Affordable rent is subject to rent controls that require a rent of no more than 80% of the local market rent (including service charges, where applicable).

Intermediate housing - homes for sale and rent provided at a cost above social rent, but below market levels subject to the criteria in the affordable housing definition above. These can include shared equity (shared ownership and equity loans), other low cost homes for sale and intermediate rent, but not affordable rented housing.

Currently, homes that do not meet the above definition of affordable housing, such as “low cost market” housing, may not be considered as affordable housing for planning purposes.

However, the Government proposes to include starter homes within the affordable housing definition (see page 13).

Planning policy for traveller sites came into force at the same time as the NPPF and requires the council to set pitch targets for travellers and plot targets for travelling show people. The needs of the travelling community have been identified through a needs assessment carried out jointly with other Leicestershire authorities in 2013. This need is identified in Policy H7 of the draft Local Plan.

The NWL Local Plan recognises that good design is indivisible from good planning. Good design in the built environment is about the way a place functions, its appearance and its relationship to its immediate and wider surroundings and how it creatively responds to opportunities and constraints. Well designed, safe and attractive new developments can help raise the quality of the built environment and the quality of lives of those who live and work there. Poorly designed buildings and spaces are known to adversely affect the quality of people’s lives – their health, happiness and their overall sense of wellbeing.

‘Secured by Design’ is the official Police security initiative for the UK, developed in 1989, that, amongst other things, focuses on the design and security of new and refurbished homes. It combines the principles of designing out crime with effective security standards and the District Council has adopted the Secured by Design Supplementary Planning Guidance which is taken into account as a material consideration in the determination of all planning applications.

The Elphicke-House report

The Government’s Autumn statement 2013 announced an independent review into the role that councils can play in supporting housing supply. In January 2014, Natalie Elphicke and Councillor Keith House were appointed to lead the review. They engaged with relevant organisations across central and local government, housing, finance and investment sectors as well as developers and specialist segments of the market in arriving at their findings.

Their report, published in January 2015 was welcomed by government and indicated that local authorities could do more to play a central role in supporting the provision of new homes, across all housing tenures, by becoming housing delivery enablers and taking responsibility for making development happen in their area.

Core Recommendation(Elphicke-House)

The local authority as Housing Delivery Enabler

Councils have a primary responsibility to assess and meet the housing needs of their local population as Housing Delivery Enablers. Councils should address and drive housing activity and housing delivery in their areas and for their local population

The role of Housing Delivery Enabler can be met through (i) community leadership and strategic clarity; (ii) creating housing opportunity; (iii) business leadership, (iv) management of housing supply, and (v) shaping a stronger housing finance market

The report stated that in order to create a culture of house building, local authorities should take responsibility for making development happen in their area, rather than purely assessing housing need and determining planning permissions.

Funding of affordable housing through Affordable Rent

The Affordable Rent model to fund new affordable housing has emerged since April 2011. This model requires providers of new build affordable housing, if supported with HCA grants, to charge rents at up to 80 per cent of market rents, and use the difference between the 'social rent' level and 'affordable rent' to fund future affordable housing development, in conjunction with lower levels of grant. Local landlords, including NWLDC, will be charging affordable rents for new build housing.

Housing Revenue Account reform

The reform of housing finance with effect from April 2012 represents a core element of the Government's housing strategy. It ended the complex housing subsidy system by transferring the national housing debt back to the remaining stock holding councils enabling them to retain future rental income from council homes rather than handing a proportion back to the Treasury. Councils now have the opportunity to decide how they wish to use the rental income and, through their business plans, set their own priorities for the future management of their housing stock. It is a key ambition of the council's business plan to increase the supply of affordable housing, including by directly building, or acquiring, council housing. However, the future financial capacity of the council's business plan is now much reduced following the 1 per cent rent reduction detailed later in this section.

Welfare reform

The government's commitment to reform the welfare system has significant implications for both tenants and landlords in the private and social housing sector. A range of benefit changes have been introduced over the last four years to housing benefit regulations and through the Welfare Reform Act 2012. The Act provides for a radical overhaul of the benefit system through the introduction of Universal Credit, a single, combined benefit for people of working age, which will replace existing benefits such as Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance and Housing Benefit. September 2015 saw the implementation of Universal Credit in Leicestershire for new single claimants.

A number of other changes affecting local residents have taken also taken place since 2011, including the introduction of Local Council Tax Support and new regulations on Housing Benefit. These restrict and reduce the level of funding many households are able to claim, such as lower rates of local housing allowance for private tenants, a cap on the level of benefit for families, and size criteria for the homes of social housing tenants.

Specific measures identified in the **Welfare Reform and Work Bill 2015** include:

- Removing 18-21 year olds' automatic entitlement to housing benefit
- Freezing working age benefits for a further two years from 2016/17
- Lowering the overall benefit cap locally from £26,000 per household to £20,000
- The rate of Housing Benefit in the social sector will be capped at the relevant local housing allowance (LHA) for new tenancies
- The adoption of LHA limits includes the application of the shared accommodation rate, limiting the amount of housing benefit under-35s can claim to the rate of a room in a shared house, rather than for a self-contained one-bedroom flat

It is important to assess the impact of loss of household income as this could increase the potential for homelessness for these groups.

Health and social care reform

With the devolution of public health responsibilities to upper tier councils, Leicestershire County Council has established a Health and Wellbeing Board to promote more joined-up commissioning of health, social care and public health services. The priorities for the Health and Wellbeing Board are:

1. Giving children the best start in life
2. Managing the shift to early intervention and prevention
3. Supporting an ageing population
4. Improving mental health and wellbeing
5. Tackling health inequalities

The standard of housing has been proven to have clear links with residents' health and wellbeing, i.e. poor quality housing often leads to ill health (mental as well as physical), increased incidence of slips, trips and falls, excess winter deaths due to cold and a higher incidence of respiratory illnesses for those living in damp homes. In developing this new strategy, NWLDC has worked with Leicestershire County Council public health service to undertake a health impact assessment of the strategic priorities to establish where we might maximise positive impacts on the wider determinants of health and health inequalities whilst minimising any negative impacts. Our action plans will take account of these objectives.

July 2015 Emergency Budget

1 percent rent decrease.

From April 2016 all housing association and council rents will be reduced by 1 percent per year for the next four years. As a result, all Registered Providers (RPs) of social housing are in the process of reviewing their business plans and future financial capacity, and are reluctant to make any new financial commitments until the full impact of the changes have been assessed. Previous commitments made by RPs to deliver new affordable housing are also being considered again in light of their now restricted capacity. Any reduction in capacity may result in fewer affordable homes being delivered in the district.

Some RPs have advised that they are no longer considering any new build schemes in 2016, and are only looking at schemes with completion from 2017 onwards though it remains unclear whether they will have the future capacity to accept new properties at a later completion date.

This situation is not just confined to NWL, conversations with the HCA and other RPs and local authorities have highlighted the same challenges across the East Midlands region. Nationally, some RPs have announced they will no longer develop any affordable housing in future, whilst others have stated that they are taking advice on deregistering so they effectively become private bodies, free of any government regulation (including rent guidance).

Initial forecasts for the council housing stock show that the effect on the council's rental income over the first 5 years of the plan will be a loss of £7.5 million. Registered Providers will be similarly affected. The strategy needs to consider these challenges, along with the future

requirement to make efficiency savings if housing providers are to maintain the decency standard of existing housing stock in the long term.

Comprehensive Spending Review November 2015

The Autumn Comprehensive spending review **Housing and Planning Bill 2015-16**

This Bill was presented to the House of Commons on 13 October 2015 and at the time of writing has reached report stage (House of Commons). It contains several proposals, the following of which will impact on our housing strategy and are summarised here:-

At a glance: Housing and Planning Bill (*Inside Housing 14 October 2015*)

- A Homes and Communities Agency 'homeownership criteria' to ensure housing associations introduce the Right to Buy or provide 'an equal or greater level of support' to tenants to help them into homeownership
- The payment of 'grant' to housing associations to fund the Right to Buy discount by the government or the Greater London Authority
- Provisions for councils to make a fixed payment to government each year, based on an estimate for the income from selling high-value vacant homes
- A duty on councils to consider selling vacant high-value housing
- Powers to reduce regulatory control over housing associations
- A general duty on councils to promote the supply of Starter Homes
- Duties on local authorities to keep, and have regard to, registers of people seeking land for self build and custom housebuilding
- Introduction of 'banning orders', which would stop bad landlords from letting properties for at least six months
- The introduction of a database of rogue landlords and letting agents and measures to make rogue landlords re-pay housing benefit to local authorities
- Measures to force 'high-income social tenants' to pay up to market rents
- Powers to allow HM Revenue and Customs to share information to help verify social tenants' declarations on their incomes
- Powers for the government to ensure that all councils get Local Plans in place by 2017, or face intervention
- Automatic planning permission in principle on brownfield sites

Additional details relating to some of the more major proposals are set out under the following headings.

Right to Buy for Housing Association Tenants

Following the Government's acceptance of the National Housing Federation's offer to implement the right to buy on a voluntary basis, the Bill provides for grants to be paid to associations to compensate them for selling homes at a discount. The Bill provides a mechanism through which local housing authorities will be required to make payments to the Secretary of State. These

payments will be calculated with reference to an authority's high value housing stock with the expectation that this stock will be sold as it becomes vacant.

Housing Association Status

In October 2015, an Office for National Statistics review concluded that English housing associations should be reclassified as part of the public sector for the purposes of national accounts, in effect pushing £60bn of public borrowing on to the government's balance sheet. This decision raised concerns that the government might seek to limit or control the level of RP or even consider nationalising associations.

However, on 15 December 2015, the Housing Minister, Brandon Lewis announced details of a deregulation package that will allow housing associations to move back into the private sector. The Minister said that housing associations will no longer need permission from the regulator to make certain changes and will have complete discretion over how to use funds from sales, including through the Right to Buy scheme.

The changes will be tabled as amendments to the Housing and Planning Bill as it progresses through parliament.

Starter Homes

Part 1 of the Housing and Planning Bill 2015-16 puts into legislation the Government's commitment to provide a number of Starter Homes for first-time buyers under the age of 40. The Government has pledged that 200,000 starter homes will be built by 2020 and sold at a discount of at least 20% of the market value. The Bill seeks to put a general duty on all planning authorities to promote the supply of Starter Homes, and provides a specific duty, to be fully developed in later regulations, to require a certain number or proportion of Starter Homes on sites.

As yet, it is unclear whether the proportion of Starter Homes required will be included in any on-site affordable housing requirement. If it is, then this will result in fewer social or affordable rented homes being delivered.

Self/custom build

The Bill adds to and amends the *Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015*, which requires local authorities to keep a register of people seeking to acquire land to build or commission their own home. The Bill specifically requires local authorities to grant "sufficient suitable development permission" of serviced plots of land to meet the demand based on this register.

Tackling 'rogue' landlords

Local authorities will have additional powers to tackle rogue landlords in the private rented sector. They will be able to apply for banning orders against private landlords. A database of rogue landlords and agents will be set up and maintained to help authorities in England in carrying out their enforcement work. Landlords will benefit from a clear process to secure repossession of properties abandoned by tenants.

Pay to Stay – higher rents for higher income social tenants

Higher income social tenants (likely to be set at earnings over £40,000 in London and £30,000 elsewhere) will be expected to pay up to a market rent as opposed to a social rent. This initiative is optional for registered providers who can keep the additional income generated from Pay to Stay. For council housing, the monetary difference between the discounted rent and the market

rent will go to central government. This requires primary legislation to be drawn up and the government is currently consulting on the proposal. The Bill proposes to allow HM Revenue and Customs office to share information with registered housing providers to help verify social tenants' declarations on their incomes.

Speeding up the planning system

There are a number of different reforms to the planning system, with the aim of speeding it up in order to deliver more housing. The Secretary of State will be able to intervene in the local and neighbourhood plan making process. There will be a new duty for the council to keep a register of brownfield land within its area which will tie in with a new system of allowing the Secretary of State to grant planning permission in principle for housing on sites identified in these registers.

It also allows for major infrastructure projects with an element of housing to apply for development consent through the *2008 Planning Act* regime, rather than having to seek separate planning permission.

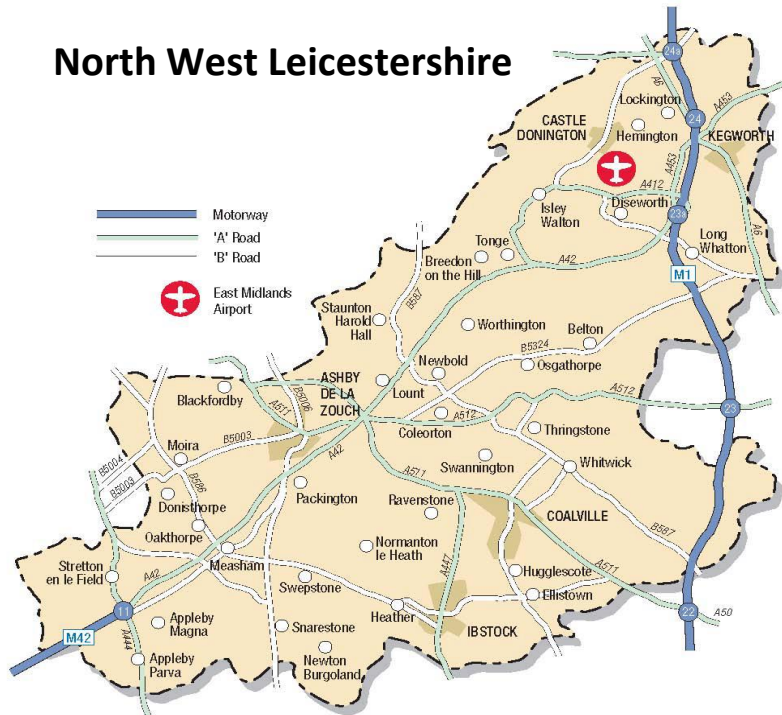
Lifetime tenancies to end

Although Councils have had the discretionary power to grant fixed-term tenancies since 2012, many, including NWLDC have not exercised this discretion. However, under an amendment to the Housing and Planning Bill 2015, lifetime tenancies for council house tenants will be phased out. New secure tenancies granted after the bill comes into force will be for a period of between two and five years.

These changes mean the tenancy will be reviewed at the end of each term, with the potential for the tenant to be evicted and having to find alternative accommodation. The changes will not apply to existing council tenants. If passed on to a family member, the tenancy will be converted to a fixed term.

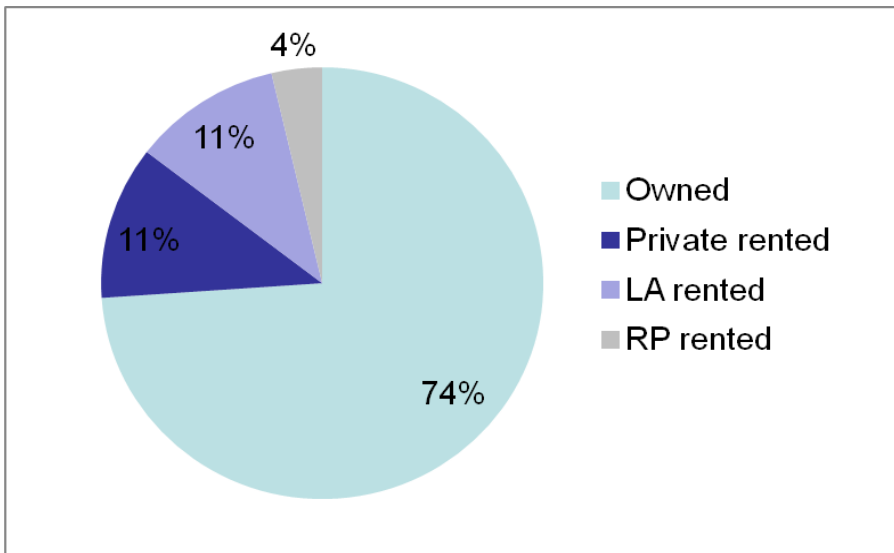
Housing associations offer assured tenancies, which can be either fixed-term or lifelong, and are unaffected by the proposed amendment. However, the government does have the power to introduce regulation via the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to limit the length of housing association tenancies as well.

5. Local Strategic Overview



According to the 2011 Census, there are 93,468 residents in North West Leicestershire in 39,128 households. Below is a chart detailing the tenure split of homes. This demonstrates that the majority of homes, 74 percent are owner occupied with 26 percent on the rental market. Of the latter, 11 percent are private rented and 11 percent are council rented with the remaining 4 percent registered provider social rent.

Compared to the East Midlands as a whole, NWL has 5 percent more owner occupiers and 4 percent less private renters. The numbers of people living in social housing are similar.



House types

The accommodation in NWL comprises mostly of houses (with concentrations of pre 1919 terrace properties in parts), and fewer smaller, flatted properties. New market properties built over the last 20 years have resulted in an increase in the number of detached properties in the district. The district is predominantly rural and housing is spread out across small towns, villages and hamlets.

Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2015

The SHMA calculates housing need in areas and is based on information from the Census 2011, demographic projection, house prices, rents, income information and a range of other local, regional and national databases.

In NWL, the SHMA identifies the need for an additional 212 affordable homes each year. The council is currently undertaking public consultation as it develops its key planning document, the Local Plan, and it is intended that this housing strategy will feed into that plan, especially with regard to the future provision of affordable housing. The Local Plan is due for publication in 2017.

Demand for Affordable Housing

Demand for affordable housing in the district remains high. The Housing Register increased by more than 50% in the year from April 2014 (490 applicants) to April 2015 (840), despite more than 500 applicants being housed into social rented homes during the same period.

Lettings Plan

As a Council, we are committed to ensuring that the limited supply of social housing available is accessed by those households that are prioritised by the existing legislation and our lettings scheme. It is also essential that the Council demonstrates fairness and transparency in allocating homes, in a situation where demand for social housing exceeds supply by almost 2:1.

The Council's first annual Lettings Plan, implemented in 2015-16, should be seen as an integral part of this process and a comprehensive approach to meeting the affordable housing needs of NWL residents.

The annual Lettings Plan will become a key element of the Council's lettings scheme that will, over time, provide a full picture of the anticipated supply of council homes based on previous

years' trends, and the groups to whom they will be let. It will also take into account the Council's statutory obligations and strategic priorities.

Coalville Project

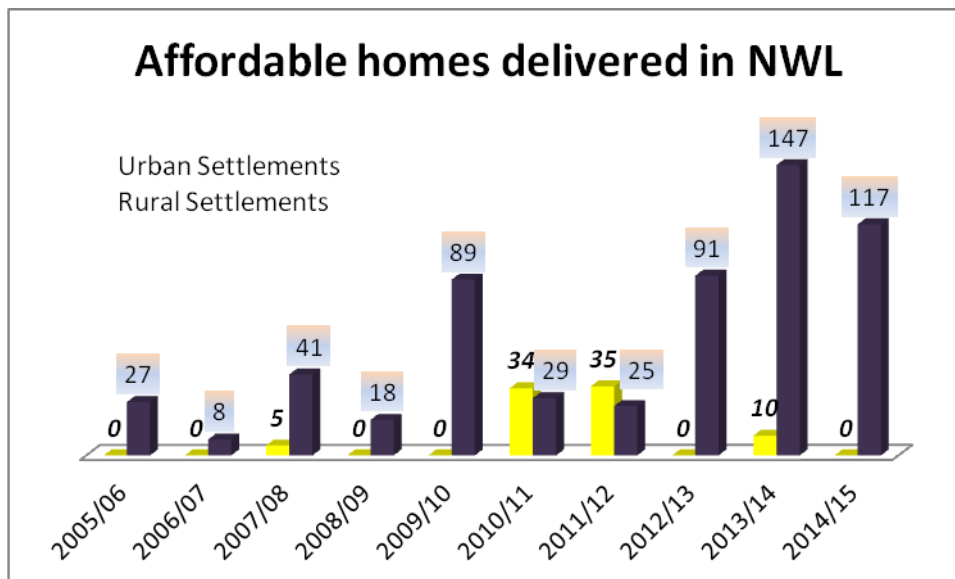
A key corporate objective for the Council is delivering the Coalville Project which aims to design and build a better Coalville. The Council's vision is to make Coalville a place where people want to live, work and socialise by having access to all the recreational activities, retail, public services, heritage, affordable housing and opportunities our community deserves. It is intended that this housing strategy will contribute to that project, especially with regard to the future provision of affordable housing.

6. Key achievements from the previous Housing Strategy

During 2014, in order to improve the likelihood of local housing associations obtaining grant in the HCA's National Affordable Housing Programme bid round for 2015-2018, the council allocated £167,000 to each of our three developing Registered Providers – emh homes, Nottingham Community Housing Association, (NCHA), and Waterloo Housing Association. This new strategic approach helped all three providers successfully acquire grant allocations from the HCA for the delivery of affordable housing schemes in the district.

Since April 2010 the council have negotiated or supported the delivery of 488 affordable homes on sites across the district

Year	Rural Settlements	Urban Settlements	Total for year
2005/06	0	27	27
2006/07	0	8	8
2007/08	5	41	46
2008/09	0	18	18
2009/10	0	89	89
2010/11	34	29	63
2011/12	35	25	60
2012/13	0	91	91
2013/14	10	147	157
2014/15	0	117	117
2015/16 (projected)	2	122	124
Ten year total	84	606	690



Rural need surveys and working with rural partners

The council is a member of the Leicestershire Rural Housing Partnership (LRHP), a group comprising all Leicestershire rural authorities, Leicestershire County Council, emhg, NCHA & Waterloo Housing and our strategic partner, Midlands Rural Housing. The Group was established to provide a strategic approach to the identification of need and the delivery of affordable homes in rural areas across Leicestershire. In 2012 all members embarked on a rolling 5 year programme to survey the housing needs of residents in settlements with less than 3,000 people.

By April 2015, twenty two smaller settlements in the district have been surveyed by the council and Midlands Rural Housing. These surveys assist understanding of the current and future housing needs of rural communities and inform all new planning applications to ensure that suitable and appropriate housing, regardless of tenure is delivered where it is required. The remaining 20 settlements will be surveyed before the end of 2017-18.

In the last five years there have been successful affordable rural schemes built in Appleby Magna, Breedon, Heather, Diseworth and Long Whatton providing 44 homes for local people.

Decent Homes programme

North West Leicestershire District Council completed its Decent Homes programme in March 2015 with 3,787 properties made decent. Improvements included:

- kitchens to 2,094 homes;
- bathrooms to 1,584 homes;
- new heating systems to 1,031 homes;
- full electrical rewiring to 574 homes;
- new doors or windows to 3,188 homes;
- new roofs to 452 homes.

Bringing empty properties back into use

At any given time there will be around 1200 empty properties in the district, around 3 percent of the total housing stock. This is slightly higher than the East Midlands average at 2.77 percent and the England average of 2.6 percent. The majority of these will only be empty for a short period of time often less than a few months. There will always be some properties that are empty pending sales or tenancy changes. However there are some properties that have been empty for much longer and it is these long term empty properties (6 months and over) that require further focus.

Over the last strategy period the council identified and worked with owners to bring these properties back into use; some were sold on the open market, brought back as privately rented lettings or purchased for social housing; others are undergoing major refurbishments or adaptations before they can be lived in.

Long Term empty properties

Year (October)	No of long term empty properties
2010	498
2011	485
2012	385
2013	367
2014	400
2015	426

New homes bonus

The new homes bonus, a central government funding stream calculated on delivery of new homes, bringing empty homes back into use, affordable home delivery and net addition to the council housing stock has bought in £5.131 million to NWLDC over the past 5 years. This funding has been used to directly protect front line, public facing services across the council. Changes to this scheme are in the pipeline whereby NHB may only be payable for 4 years or less rather than 6 years. Details on this are still to be finalised

Renewal of and changes to the Housing Register

The Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL), a partnership consisting of the seven Leicestershire district councils, was introduced in 2011. Following the Localism Act 2012 our Allocations and Lettings policy was reviewed and approved by Members in March 2013, and is based on a common set of priorities developed by the CBL partners. This system provides increased choice and transparency for all homeseekers applying for social housing across Leicestershire.

The current allocations and lettings policy was implemented in April 2014. It followed an application renewal process in November 2013, a system upgrade in April 2014, and a full re-registration and banding process to update the applications in line with the current policy. When the review process started there were 1533 applicants on the Housing Register, after the renewal process 859 re-registration forms were sent out. 490 of those registrations, approximately 57 percent, were returned and went live in April 2014. There are 751 applicants on the register at the 1st January 2016.

Since April 2014 we have operated a rolling monthly renewal process to ensure all NWLDC applications are current, providing the council with accurate and up to date information on local housing demand.

7. Our ambitions for housing in North West Leicestershire

North West Leicestershire will be a place where people and businesses feel they belong and are proud to call home.

Consultation

The Housing Choices team have delivered workshop style consultation events with key groups and stakeholders in the district to gain an initial understanding of key challenges and themes.

These groups are:

- The NWL Strategic Housing Partnership,
- NWLDC officers from planning, housing management, private sector housing, safer and stronger communities, housing repairs and maintenance, planning policy
- The Tenants and Leaseholders Consultation Forum
- NWLDC ward members
- Parish Councils.

During these events information and data on housing, both nationally and in NWL was presented to the groups who then identified challenges and discussed possible solutions.

Further consultation has taken place with parish councils and the general public through meetings and an online survey.

Challenges identified during the consultation:

Information on the Changing demographics and housing in NWL	
<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Solution</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ageing population that will require more care services and new housing solutions • More families that have members with disabilities and require adaptations • There is increasing demand by applicants for affordable housing as measured by a growing Housing Register, particularly for 1 and 2 bedroom homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather information from tenants and partners on residents' future care needs • Ascertain the type of housing older people wish to live in • Actively participate in the Lightbulb project so there is a coordinated approach to supporting vulnerable residents • Use needs information to implement preventative measures in homes e.g. wide paths for people over a certain age • Undertake a housing stock condition survey across the private housing sector
Empty Homes	
<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Solution</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term empty homes in the private sector can be tied up with legal processes and then become hard to let due to the declining standard of the property • Some Council sheltered housing schemes no longer meet the requirements of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider converting hard to let homes into shared accommodation or 1 bed flats/bedsits • Consider more enforcement action against owners of empty properties in poor condition

elderly residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sell sheltered schemes to private developers, and re-invest proceeds • Convert sheltered schemes to create a Foyer system of supported housing for vulnerable people • Redevelop sheltered schemes
Funding for affordable housing	
<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Solution</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower HCA grant levels in the Affordable Homes Programme 2015 – 18 bid round, means the capacity of RPs delivering affordable housing is reduced. • Rent decrease for social housing will likely lead to a future reduction in the numbers of new affordable homes being developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council work with RPs and private developers to consider most cost effective way of providing affordable housing on new build schemes • All social housing providers to map the impact of rent decrease on their business plan and work together to mitigate the impact
Standards of housing across all tenures	
<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Solution</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent decrease for council and housing associations give less money to maintaining decency standards in future • Some home owners find it difficult to source reliable and trustworthy trades people to do small maintenance jobs in the home • Excess winter deaths in NWL are significantly higher than the national average which will in part be linked to fuel poverty • Some areas are off-gas where heating can be more expensive • Aids and adaptations take a long time to install 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active management of stock so alternative solutions found for properties with high investment needs • Support the Lightbulb project to set up handyman scheme to carry out minor jobs for elderly frail residents • Consider plan for off gas areas with possibility of community collective payment for installation • Review procedures for assessment and installation of aids and adaptations in council homes
Lack of support for vulnerable residents	
<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Solution</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reductions in prevention funding have meant that adult social care providers have had to raise their eligibility thresholds which has created a gap in low and medium level support which housing providers may have to consider filling through additional tenancy support • Pressures on funding for some key homeless prevention services in adult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closely monitor any adverse impacts of reductions in homelessness prevention funding and address these through the multi agency Prevention of Homelessness Strategy. • Consider warden based service type schemes • Use lettings and allocations policies to match properties with appropriate need

<p>social care has meant a reduction in the number of hostel spaces, domestic abuse support and homeless prevention support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide tenancy support • Work with health partners to highlight the correlation between good appropriate housing and emotional and physical wellbeing
<p>Sustainable and inclusive communities</p>	
<p><i>Challenge</i></p>	<p><i>Solution</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not everyone can meet their own housing and/or housing related support needs • The impacts of welfare, health and social care reforms are not widely understood • Communities cohesion can be threatened by change and fears of anti-social behaviour • Provision of community facilities and recreational open space on new developments should cater for all needs, including those with less mobility and aim to bring different groups together. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the housing needs and aspirations of our residents (including those adequately housed and those on the Housing Register), so we can target services and support those in greatest need • Work with partners to maintain a supply of quality, affordable homes of the right size and in the right location for those unable to access market housing • Provide access to good quality information and advice to enable people to make choices e.g. information and advice about housing options, homelessness prevention, welfare benefits, money advice • Continue to allocate council and housing association homes through the choice based lettings scheme so that tenants are housed in communities of their choice • Reduce fears, and foster ownership, by consulting and involving local communities in the design and delivery of projects • Consult local residents on local letting policies • Work with partners to make sure new homes are attractive to people who wish to move into the area and to our existing communities • Encourage and support residents to participate in and contribute to their communities and the local economy • Use building for life criteria and 'Safer by Design' standards in new build and redevelopment

8. Housing strategy 2016 – 2021 themes and objectives

The initial consultation demonstrates certain key areas have been identified by all stakeholders. Aligning these with national and local housing policies and changes, we have based the new housing strategy on the following three themes:

1 Supply –

- Maintain and increase supply of good quality new homes of all tenures to support economic growth in the district having regard to potential health impact
- Maintain and increase the supply of affordable homes, in a challenging financial environment, including the construction and acquisition of new affordable homes by North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC)
- Work with developers to provide the best mix of housing types including Starter Homes identified as a government initiative in the Autumn Budget 2015
- The council, affordable housing providers and housing developers to collaborate on addressing financial challenges in maintaining stock, and delivering new homes in order to meet growing demand from the housing register
- Unlock the potential of vacant sites and empty homes by working with private and public landlords and owners to bring empty homes back into use
- Make best use of existing council homes, including selective asset disposals where necessary to re-invest proceeds and converting empty council homes to provide alternative accommodation that meets local housing needs
- Update the affordable housing supplementary planning document to allow a more flexible application of affordable housing obligations through planning to facilitate a broader range of measures to maintain delivery
- Use lettings plans to promote community cohesion, including the integration of new residents into existing communities

2 Standards –

- Improve the condition and energy efficiency of council homes through maintaining decency standards, and raising them where possible
- Support and implement schemes for low level handyman work that prevents accidents or injuries to residents or avoids more expensive future maintenance work
- Explore provision of life-time homes on new developments
- Commission a stock condition survey of private rented sector and owner occupied homes to establish up to date information about these sectors and inform what, and where, action is needed
- Work with private landlords and home owners to improve the condition of private homes, making them more suitable for vulnerable groups, including the frail elderly
- Continue the council's Green and Decent Homes energy efficiency projects and make an informed decision regarding future suitability for tenants in council homes
- Work with developers and partners to ensure community facilities and open spaces are maintained to a high standard
- Promote high quality internal and external design for new affordable homes

3 Support –

- Reduce fuel poverty across all tenures
- Prevent homelessness by giving timely advice and assistance to high risk groups
- Provide tenancy support to vulnerable groups
- Support those affected by welfare, health and social care reforms and encourage them to adapt to the changes
- Improve the understanding of the range of housing options and housing related support that are available
- Work with our ageing population to ascertain the type and location of housing they require
- Promote inclusion and cohesion by consulting with and involving local residents in community issues and initiatives
- Work with partners to implement the guidance of the Care Act 2014 which states that: “Developing a local approach to preventative support should include the involvement of those responsible for public health, leisure, transport and housing services”

9. FIVE YEAR PLAN

Annual action plans will be drawn up to achieve the following high level aims. The plans will be developed and monitored by the NWL Strategic Housing Partnership.

SUPPLY – NWL HAS APPROPRIATE HOMES FOR ALL RESIDENTS	
Aim	Action
Maintain and increase supply of good quality new homes	The council will build some new homes
	Bring all affordable housing providers together to address financial challenges with a collaborative approach
	Work with planning department to implement a more flexible approach to affordable housing delivery
	Work with developers of market and affordable housing to provide the best mix of housing types in locations where need has been identified
Vacant sites and empty homes	The council will consider disposing of assets to reinvest proceeds into other social housing stock
	Identify existing vacant sites and sites with potential for redevelopment
	Work with private sector landlords and owners to bring empty homes back into use
	Consider conversion of empty council properties into accommodation that meets housing need

STANDARDS – IMPROVE QUALITY OF HOMES ACROSS SOCIAL AND PRIVATE SECTORS	
Aim	Action
Improve the quality of affordable housing stock	Maintain decency standard and achieve higher standards where possible
	Implement green energy initiatives for tenants in council properties
	Consider setting up a council handyman scheme for minor jobs
	Work with developers and partners to make sure community facilities and open spaces are maintained to a high standard
	Promote high quality internal and external design on new affordable homes
Improve standards in private sector	Undertake a private sector housing stock condition survey
	Scope possibility for trusted trader scheme
	Secure proportion of “life time homes” standards for new private sector homes so that as residents’ needs change they are still able to stay at home
	Support the Lightbulb project to set up a minor jobs handyman scheme that prevent accident or injury
	Promote high quality internal and external design for

	new homes
	Work with developers and partners to make sure agreements regarding the maintenance of community facilities and open spaces are in place

SUPPORT – RESIDENTS IN NWL CAN ACCESS APPROPRIATE SUPPORT	
Aim	Action
Work with partners from Health and Social care to implement housing related areas of the Care Act 2014 guidance	Identify and implement housing related preventative care and support to help tenants remain safely in their own homes for as long as possible, increasing their wellbeing, for example, Lightbulb project
Reduce excess winter deaths	Implement initiatives that reduce fuel poverty such as collective energy switching schemes or community purchasing in off-gas areas
Prevent homelessness	Provide targeted advice and support to high risk vulnerable groups such as tenancy support for young people
Create sustainable and inclusive communities where people want to live	Improve the understanding of the range of housing options and housing related support that is available
	Support those affected by welfare, health and social care reform
	Work with our ageing population to ascertain the type and location of housing they require
	Reduce fears by consulting with and involving local residents in the design and delivery of new build council projects
	Promote 'Safer by Design' standards in new build and redevelopment to promote community safety
	Use lettings plans to promote community cohesion including integrating new residents into existing communities

10. OWNERSHIP AND MONITORING

This strategy has been developed by the North West Leicestershire Strategic Housing Partnership:

North West Leicestershire District Council
Leicestershire County Council Early Help
Leicestershire County Council Adults and Communities
Public Health England
Homes and Communities Agency
East Midlands Housing Group
NCHA
Midlands Rural Housing
David Wilson Homes
Westleigh Homes
Marlene Reid Centre
Falcon Centre
Waterloo Housing Group
NWL Tenants and leaseholders
Citizens Advice Bureau
Leicestershire Probation Services

11. GLOSSARY

Being finalised