



**KINGSTON'S**

# **Housing Strategy 2011 to 2015**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## Introduction

1. This is Kingston's Housing Strategy for the period 2011-1015. This Consultation Draft has been issued by the Kingston Strategic Housing Partnership, which brings together the key organisations dealing with Housing in the Borough. This includes the Council, Housing Associations, residents, voluntary organisations and the education and health sectors.
2. Home is important to all residents of the Borough. People will have a stake in this Strategy in different ways; parents may be concerned about where their children will live; home-owners may need to make their home energy-efficient; council tenants will want to see their home brought up to standard.
3. Housing affects many aspects of the quality of life. For example, poor housing can contribute to poor health and child poverty. Addressing climate change will mean improving the energy-efficiency of homes in the borough. The Housing Strategy can make an important contribution in each of these areas.
4. For Kingston as a whole, a key challenge is how to balance population growth in the future with the supply of homes and the infrastructure needed to support it. This must be achieved while protecting and enhancing the existing character of the Borough, concentrating on brownfield development and existing growth points.
5. The context for the Housing Strategy is set by the Kingston Plan, which provides a vision for the Borough in 2020 as one of the very best places in which to live and work.
6. The role of the Housing Strategy is to contribute towards achieving this vision. Kingston is already a successful place and most people are well-housed. However, there are some important issues to be addressed:
  - Projected population growth over the next few years means more homes are needed to buy and rent, including affordable homes for people on low or modest incomes; this must be done while enhancing the character of the Borough
  - The condition of some public and private sector homes is not satisfactory and many are not energy-efficient
  - Some residents do not have a home which is suitable for them and
  - Some residents need specific types of support within their accommodation.
7. The key elements of the Strategy are:

- To plan for more new housing, of all tenures, in suitable locations in Kingston and of the right size and quality; there will be a particular emphasis on new affordable housing using the new Affordable Rent model. This will be achieved while protecting and enhancing the character of the Borough.
- To bring all council homes up to the Decent Homes Standard by 2016 and talk to residents about the long-term future of some of the larger housing estates.
- To provide private owners with the advice and assistance they need to make their homes energy efficient.
- To support a thriving private rental sector in Kingston, which provides accommodation for all income groups and which is well managed.
- To provide co-ordinated advice and services to people who are having difficulty with their housing and to prevent and minimise homelessness.
- To exploit opportunities to improve other aspects of quality of life in the borough, for example, health or educational attainment, through improving housing provision.

## PART ONE: Context and Vision

### Borough Profile

8. Kingston has a population of 157,000, the smallest of any London Borough. Projections by the Office of National Statistics suggest that over the period 2008-2018, Kingston will be one of the areas with the highest population growth.
9. Kingston is the top quartile of Local Authorities with the highest life expectancy for men and women. The age profile of the Borough reflects its popularity as a base for young professional people living in London.
10. In the 2001 census, 15.5% of residents were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups.
11. Kingston has a lively evening economy and a thriving retail sector; it is 25<sup>th</sup> in the UK in terms of retail expenditure.
12. Unemployment is much lower than the national average, although levels of unemployment vary across the Borough, with the highest numbers on Job Seekers Allowance located in Norbiton Ward.
13. Kingston has one of the lowest levels of recorded crime in London.
14. School pupil attainment is high: 85% of young people leave school qualified to level 2 (5 GCSEs Grade C and above or equivalent)

15. Kingston is generally considered a relatively affluent area, though with pockets of relative deprivation, associated with concentrations of social housing.
16. More than 8 out of 10 residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live.

### **Context for the Housing Strategy**

17. There is a requirement for Kingston's Housing Strategy to be in general conformity with the Mayor for London's London Housing Strategy.
18. Within Kingston, the two key associated documents are the Kingston Plan and the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework.
19. The Kingston Plan is the Community Plan for the Borough and sets out the vision of Kingston Strategic Partnership for a Kingston:
  - which has a national reputation as the best place to live and work
  - where residents are confident about the future – a place where things happen
  - where residents consider the services that matter most are of a high quality
  - which has an outstanding reputation for innovation, engagement and designing services with users.

One of the overall themes of the Kingston Plan is to increase the supply of housing and its affordability.

The Local Development Framework (LDF) is Kingston's key planning strategy and policy document. This provides that the Council, with its partners, will take full advantage of opportunities to deliver new housing, particularly affordable housing. This should be delivered in the most suitable locations and with the associated infrastructure necessary to support it. The LDF sets out the preferred locations for new housing, including Kingston Town Centre, the local District Centres of Surbiton, Tolworth and New Malden, areas most accessible to public transport and areas in need of improvement or renewal.

### **National Policy Changes**

20. This Housing Strategy has been written at a time of change in housing policy at a national level:
  - in Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowances, affecting in particular people living in private rented accommodation

- changing the powers for local authorities to discharge the homelessness duty into the private sector
  - introducing 'flexible tenancies' for tenants of social housing
  - a new model for the financing of new affordable housing which will mean higher rents than hitherto
  - reform the system of financing council housing
21. Plans for addressing these issues are covered at different points in the strategy.

### **Mayor for London's Housing Strategy**

22. The Statutory housing strategy for London sets out the Mayor for London's vision for housing in the capital based on three central themes;
- Housing aspirations, promoting opportunities
  - Improving homes, transforming neighbourhoods
  - Maximising delivery, optimising value for money
  - The policies within the Mayor's strategy form the framework for determining London's public housing investment.

### **Strategic Housing Partnership Board**

23. In Kingston, the Strategic Housing Partnership Board is responsible for the development of this Housing Strategy and for its annual review. The Board brings together residents, Registered Social Landlords, the University and health services together with the Council and other partners to deliver better housing for Borough residents.

### **Celebrating our Successes**

24. There have been a number of major achievements in the Housing field in the Borough over the last few years including:
- Preventing homelessness, including halving the number of homelessness applications over the last 6 years
  - Promoting some high-quality affordable housing schemes, including those at Ely Court and St Andrews
  - Improving the energy efficiency of council homes
  - Introduced a new Overcrowding Strategy to assist families in finding more suitable accommodation.

## PART TWO: THE HOUSING PROFILE OF KINGSTON

### Strategic Housing Market Assessment

25. A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) has been undertaken to cover the seven London Boroughs, including Kingston, within the South-West London Housing Partnership. This provides a robust evidence base for the Local Development Framework and Housing Strategy.
26. Amongst the key findings for Kingston are:
- Owner-occupation is significantly higher than the London average while the stock of social rented housing is relatively small
  - The medium earned income for employees in Kingston in 2008 was £30,932, slightly lower than the average for London
  - The housing stock in Kingston has increased at a slower rate than in London or England as a whole over the last 10 years.
  - The projected increase in the number of households in the period to 2031 is the highest amongst South West London authorities.
27. The SHMA suggests that on an annual basis there will be 887 newly-forming households requiring affordable housing and a further 285 existing households. The total future need for affordable housing is therefore estimated to be 1,672 units per annum.

### Local Housing Market

28. In Kingston, average house prices are amongst the highest in the country and high income levels are needed to gain access to owner-occupation. The average price for a home at the lower end of the market is in the region of £160,000 to £200,000.
29. There are considerable variations in prices between neighbourhoods, with prices in the South of the Borough lower on average than elsewhere in the Borough.
30. The trend of house prices over the last few years in Kingston broadly follows that for Greater London as a whole. Kingston house prices have not been affected to the same degree as those in other parts of the country by the fall in prices since 2008.
31. Looking at the costs for different forms of accommodation in Kingston, the lowest weekly cost is in homes owned by the Council; the highest costs are in home ownership.

32. 14% of dwellings in Kingston are privately-rented. This sector plays a major role, for example, in accommodating students in the Borough and in helping labour mobility. It also provides a source of accommodation for people on low or modest incomes, particularly those referred by the Council.
33. The Council directly owns and manages 4,800 rented homes. The majority of these homes are one or two bedrooms; many of the one bed homes are sheltered accommodation.
34. Most Council property is in small, low or medium-rise flatted blocks, though there are some larger estates eg Cambridge Road. The greatest concentration of council homes is in Norbiton ward.

### **Housing Register**

35. In March 2011, 8236 households were registered on Kingston's Housing Register. This is some 2,000 higher than in 2007.

Numerically, the greatest demand is for 1 or 2 bedroom homes. However, proportionately, the greatest gap between available social housing and requirements of those in greatest need on the Register is for family-sized accommodation. This is why priority is given to larger homes within the Council's housing and planning policies.

### **Housing Benefit**

36. In 2010, about 10,300 households in Kingston claimed Housing Benefit for assistance with their housing costs. Of these, just under 5,000 claims were from private tenants and 3,700 from council tenants.

## **PART THREE: OUR PRIORITIES**

### **Theme I: Understand and Respond to the Needs of the Community**

37. Most people in Kingston are well housed in accommodation they can afford. Amongst the challenges the Borough faces are increasing the supply of homes and improving the quality and energy efficiency of existing housing in the Borough, and these are considered later in the strategy.
38. However, for a minority of residents, they do not have a home which is suitable for them or secure.
39. In looking at the requirements of these residents the strategy seeks to:

- Understand and monitor the housing the housing needs of different communities in the Borough
- Support residents in meeting their own housing requirements
- Support the voluntary sector in meeting the housing needs of different groups in the community, particularly where they are vulnerable
- Where public assistance is needed, target it at those most in need.

### **Providing Housing Options and Preventing Homelessness**

- Homelessness is a problem in Kingston but over the last few years the Council and its voluntary sector partners have been successful in preventing homelessness. In 2009/10, 195 homelessness preventions were achieved.
  - As a result, the number of households accepted as homeless by the Council has dropped significantly from 230 in 2006/7 to 140 in 2009/10. Less than one third of those who apply as homeless are accepted.
40. Instead there is a comprehensive Housing Advice and Options service offered to private occupiers and landlords aimed at preventing homelessness. In 2009/10, the service dealt with 1,180 enquiries.
41. Youth homelessness is an issue in Kingston as it is nationally and there is a need to focus on preventing homelessness amongst young people.

### **Providing Housing Support**

42. The Supporting People programme in Kingston provides grant of £4.4m per year to a range of separate providers, who in turn provide 1,617 units of supported accommodation in the Borough.
43. The client groups currently receiving most funding are; Mental Health, Homeless People, People with Learning Disabilities and Older People. The service is in a period of considerable budget reductions and it will be important over the next few years to ensure value for money from the resources available and to emphasise the importance of prevention work.
44. Providing move-on accommodation for people in supported housing is a major challenge; a more co-ordinated approach is required for non-priority homeless households and homeless young people.

### **Rough Sleepers**

45. The number of rough sleepers in Kingston is low compared to other London Boroughs, probably 10 or less. The Council works with partner agencies such as Kingston Churches Action for Homelessness to assist homeless people on the street who are not necessarily eligible for assistance under homelessness legislation.

46. In 2010, the Council developed a 10-point plan to address rough sleeping in the Borough, as part of a joint response by boroughs in South West London. This included measures such as improving referrals to London Street Rescue and adopting the London Reconnections protocol. More recently the "No Second Night Out" initiative has been launched by the Mayor for London and Kingston now makes available assessment bed spaces for use by London Street Rescue where immediate assistance is needed.

### **Homelessness Forum**

47. The Homelessness Forum brings together the Council and the community sector to tackle homelessness. This Forum needs to be strengthened to undertake some new initiatives around this important social and economic issue.

### **The Government's Housing and Welfare Reforms – A Co-ordinated Approach**

48. The Coalition Government has announced fundamental changes in the fields of Housing and Welfare Benefits, social housing tenancies and homelessness powers for the local authority. A co-ordinated and comprehensive response to them is required by housing agencies in the Borough.

49. The Housing Strategy includes a commitment to produce a co-ordinated plan which covers:

- The response to changes in benefits
- The potential use of powers to discharge the homelessness duty into the private sector
- The procurement of temporary accommodation
- The impact of flexible tenancies in social housing and any changes required in the Council's Allocations Policy.

### **Tenancy Strategy**

50. The Localism Bill gives local authorities a new duty to produce a new Tenancy Strategy for social housing in their area, including the use of flexible tenancies. The Tenancy Strategy for Kingston will be produced by March 2012.

### **Wheelchair adapted homes**

51. The Council seeks to achieve 10% wheelchair provision in new residential schemes and especially within the affordable housing development programme. This was achieved in 2009/10 and 2010/11 and will continue to be a priority for the Partnership.

### **Tackling Overcrowding and Under-Occupancy**

52. The issue of people living in overcrowded conditions has been recognised as a priority by the Government and locally in Kingston. Overcrowding can seriously affect other aspects of life such as health and educational attainment. Tackling the related issue of under-occupation is also a key priority, since this can free-up larger accommodation.
53. The main focus of the Overcrowding Strategy has been to help overcrowded Council and Housing Association tenants. Up to January 2011 a total of 70 households had been rehoused.
54. The target is also to achieve 45 under-occupation moves in 2011/12, following the 41 moves managed in 2009/10.

### **Addressing the Needs of an Ageing Population**

55. The Council has almost 900 sheltered housing units in the Borough catering for people over 55 and more are provided by Registered Social Landlords.
56. These provide a range of facilities and services ranging from common rooms and treatment rooms to coffee mornings and bingo sessions. Age Concern arranges lunch clubs in some at the schemes which enable older residents in the surrounding community to enjoy the company of others and a hot, 3 course meal.
57. However, the issue of housing for older people goes much wider than the stock of social housing. As part of this strategy we will undertake a major review of housing for older people in Kingston, encompassing RSL provision, facilities provided or accessed by Adult Services and the services available to enable residents to remain in their own homes.

### **Resettlement Support for Vulnerable Households**

58. The Council's Resettlement and Support Service works with accepted homeless applicants and people with a variety of vulnerabilities to help them settle into their new (temporary or permanent) home and to maintain their tenancy. The service is offered to households which include people with mental health or drug or alcohol problems, or who are suffering or fleeing domestic abuse.

### **Domestic Violence – The Sanctuary Scheme**

59. The Borough has successfully operated a public and private sector sanctuary scheme since 2006; this has secured 57 sanctuary places for clients affected by domestic violence. As part of this strategy we will produce an updated Domestic Violence policy for housing agencies in the Borough.

## **Housing and the Rise of the Community Sector**

60. The Community Sector in Kingston continues to provide valuable services to local residents, ranging from housing advice and assistance to referrals and signposting.
61. The Partnership recognises the valuable role these services play in;
  - Helping reduce and prevent homelessness
  - Providing advice and support to vulnerable households and ensuring marginalised groups have access to advice services
  - Intervening in a timely way with casework.
62. Through the Homelessness Forum the Partnership will work further to improve communication, referrals and signposting arrangements between the statutory and community sector.

## **Student Housing**

63. Students are an important component of the population in Kingston and make a vital contribution to the local economy. The LDF Core Strategy includes consideration of further, purpose-built accommodation for students and measures in this Strategy to improve conditions in the private rented sector will benefit the student population.

## **Housing Equalities**

64. The Council's commitment to equality, encompassed in the Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy 2010, is that no one equality strand is more important than any other and that all strands must be embraced equally.
65. This Housing Strategy refers at various points to the different client groups that make up the Equalities Strands; for example, wheelchair users, older people and people who are the subject of hate crimes based on their sexuality, race or religion.
66. We know from national statistics that the majority of homelessness applications are from female-led single parent households and women affected by domestic violence. This group is therefore particularly reliant on the provision of social housing and other accommodation by local authorities. The national picture shows that Black and Minority Ethnic households are disproportionately represented in relation to Homelessness. This is also reflected in relation to overcrowding and housing register applications.
67. In Kingston, approximately a third of applicants for housing are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) origin and a similar proportion of lettings in social housing

on to BME applicants. The current Allocations Policy has a positive impact on BME applicants.

68. The Council currently compiles and monitors information on the equalities strands, eg gender and race. However, we recognise there is scope to go further and via this strategy we will explore the development of a new equalities plan with a view to mitigating the effects of Housing inequality in Kingston.

### **What we will do**

- Commission an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Kingston
- Provide specialised services for people needing housing support through the framework of the Supporting People Strategy
- Devise and implement a comprehensive Plan for Older Peoples' Housing in Kingston
- Produce an updated Domestic Violence policy for housing services in the Borough
- Ensure that new homes are built to "Lifetime" standards and that at least 10% are wheelchair accessible or easily adaptable for wheelchair users
- Minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast hotels and annexes for homeless households
- Strengthen the role of the Homelessness Forum as a focus for partnership work between the voluntary and statutory sectors
- Via the Homelessness Forum, develop a co-ordinated Housing advice, homelessness prevention, signposting and referral service for residents in Kingston
- Produce a homelessness prevention and move-on framework for young people and non-statutory homeless households
- Implement Kingston's 10 Point Plan and contribute to the South West London Strategy on Rough Sleeping and to the Mayor for London's No Second Night Out project.
- Develop a co-ordinated Rent Deposit Scheme for households who are not statutorily homeless
- Produce a Consolidated Action Plan in response to changes in Housing and Welfare Benefits, and homelessness and social housing tenancy legislation
- Develop and publish a statutory Tenancy Strategy
- Reduce under-occupancy and overcrowding in social housing
- Develop a local equalities action plan for housing services
- Address the housing requirements of the student population through consideration of new supply in the LDF Core Strategy and joint work between RBK and the University over standards in private sector housing.

## Theme 2: Increasing the Supply of Homes

69. The Housing Strategy has identified the need for more homes in the Borough; more housing of all tenures is required, but particularly affordable housing.
70. Our objectives are to:
- Increase the supply of homes of a variety of tenures
  - To do so in a way which contributes to Kingston as a place by encouraging new homes in suitable locations, with high standards of design and sustainability, while protecting and enhancing the existing character of the Borough
  - Provide affordable homes for residents who cannot find housing on the open market.

### Local Development Framework (LDF): Core Strategy

71. The Core Strategy is Kingston's planning strategy and policy document. It is timetabled for formal adoption in May 2012.
72. It confirms the borough's annual target, as set out in the London Plan for the period 2012/13 to 2026/27 is to achieve 385 new units per year of housing of all tenures.
73. The preferred locations for new housing are Kingston Town Centre, the three District Centres of Surbiton, Tolworth and New Malden, areas with the greatest public transport accessibility and areas in need of improvement or renewal.
74. The Core Strategy expects that proposals for new residential developments will have a mix of dwelling sizes and types; there should be a minimum 30% of dwellings of 3 or more bedrooms unless this can be shown to be unsuitable or unviable.
75. The Council wants to maximise the delivery of new affordable homes. It will seek to deliver 2,000 new affordable housing units in the period 2012/13 to 2026/27.
76. Further specific provisions of the Core Strategy are:
- To expect developments of 5 or more units to provide the maximum reasonable amount of affordable housing, subject to viability
  - On sites of 10 or more units, 50% of the units to be provided as affordable housing
  - Within the affordable housing element, there would be a 70:30 split between social rented and intermediate provision

- The Council will try to maximise affordable housing provision on publicly-owned land.

### **Affordable Housing Development**

77. In 2010/11 National funding in Kingston for affordable housing was £11m. Anticipated completions in 2010/11 were 88 units, following the 100 in the previous year. Rent completions include successful schemes at St Andrews in Surbiton, where 16 social rented units were provided, and 215 Richmond Road, Kingston (13 social rented and 6 intermediate flats).
78. It is anticipated 102 units will be provided in 2011/12.
79. Over the period since 2007/8, 52% of new social rented units have been family-sized homes.

### **Supporting Home Ownership**

80. Over the last few years the Council's Grants to Move Scheme has assisted council tenants wishes to buy a home in the private sector, freeing-up a unit of affordable housing for another household which requires it. Over the period 2007-2010 33 units of accommodation were released in this way. Budgetary restrictions have meant this scheme has stopped for the time being, but it will be continued if resources allow.
81. As part of its programme to increase the supply of affordable housing a number of "Home-Buy", usually shared ownership schemes have been supported in recent years and a total of 90 completions were achieved in the period 2007-2010. Such schemes to encourage home ownership will still be included in affordable housing schemes over the life of this strategy.

### **Affordable Rent Model 2011-2015**

82. From April 2011 and for the life of this strategy, new affordable housing for rent will be under the "Affordable Rent" model introduced by the Coalition Government, rather than at social rents. These rents will be higher than before, at up to 80% of market rents; this may be twice or more than twice the level of social rents.

### **Borough Investment Plan**

83. Kingston's Borough Investment Plan (BIP) was submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) in February 2011. It aims to bring together in one document the strategy for Government investment in the area, particularly in Housing, with the place-shaping priorities of the local authority and in particular information about development opportunities over the period 2011-2015.

84. The BIP confirms a number of key areas for change in the Borough when the Council's place-shaping activities will be concentrated:
- The Tolworth Strategy
  - Kingston Town Centre
  - The Hogsmill Valley Project
  - Estate Regeneration
85. The BIP includes a Site Management Plan showing the key potential development sites for affordable housing over the next few years.

### **Position Statement on Affordable Housing**

86. The BIP also includes a position statement by the Council on the stance to be adopted to the Government's new Affordable Rent model. This says that while there is concern that the new arrangements could make it more difficult for people on low or modest incomes to secure housing at a price they can afford the authority will:
- Work positively and pro-actively with RSL partners to make the new arrangements work
  - Encourage the development of priority sites
  - Promote the best arrangements on rents, nomination rights and tenancies and in a pragmatic way which does not discourage development
  - Reach an understanding with RSL partners on how to maximise the benefits for Kingston residents.

### **Delivery of New Affordable Housing**

87. The Council will work pro-actively with its key developing RSL partners; Affinity Sutton, London and Quadrant, Paragon, Thames Valley and Wandle in order to maximise the delivery of affordable homes.
88. The first year of this strategy, 2011/12 will be the period when the pattern of investment and development for the following three years will be set including the implementation of the new Affordable Rent model. The Council will look to agree with its RSL partners a framework for how the model will operate.

### **Innovation in Housing Provision – Temporary Use of small sites**

89. For a variety of reasons, development sites may remain undeveloped for a number of years. The Council will support the YMCA in looking to progress a pilot scheme to provide homes on a temporary basis as an appropriate site in the Borough.

## What we will do

- Maximise the delivery of new homes in the Borough, in suitable locations, with priority given to family sized homes. Do so in a way which protects and enhances the existing character of the Borough, concentrating on brownfield sites and existing growth points
- Place a particular emphasis on the provision of new affordable homes ) and maximise the public funding available for affordable housing in Kingston
- Assist residents on a range of incomes into affordable home-ownership
- Pro-actively encourage the development of sites and address barriers to development
- Establish effective partnership arrangements with RSLs, the Homes and Communities Agency and the Greater London Authority for the implementation of the new Affordable Rent model
- Support place-shaping priorities in the Borough in the planning and design of new homes
- In collaboration with the YMCA, develop a project to look at the creative temporary use of small sites for accommodation.

## Theme 3: Improve the Quality and Provision of Public Sector Homes

90. The 4,800 homes owned and managed by the Council are structurally sound and the great majority have a long term future. However, over the last decade Government financial restrictions has meant investment in repairs and improvements has been low.
91. Our Objectives are:
- A high standard of accommodation and environment for council tenants and leaseholders
  - Full involvement of residents in developing services
  - A viable long term Business Plan for the Council's housing stock
  - A clear approach for those parts of the housing stock where regeneration may be an option
  - High levels of resident satisfaction and efficient and effective management of homes.

### Condition of Council Homes

92. In April 2010, 34% of council homes did not meet the Government's minimum Decent Homes Standard. A survey by Savills shows £191m of investment is needed over the next 30 years.

## **Self Financing of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**

93. From April 2012, the Council housing finance system will change. Instead of paying a third of the rent paid by tenants back to the Government the Council will keep all of the rent. In exchange, the Council will take on additional debt, currently estimated at £105m.
94. It is anticipated the new system will mean:
- An increase in investment in council homes
  - More effective long term planning of the management of the Council's housing assets.

## **Decent Homes**

95. In addition to resources becoming available through HRA Self-financing, the Council has also successfully bid for and received £11.6m of backlog funding for decent homes work over the period 2012/13 to 2014/15.
96. The commitment in this strategy is to bring all council homes in Kingston up to the Decent Homes Standard by April 2016.

## **HRA Business Plan**

97. The new financial arrangements for council homes will allow for the building of a new 30 year HRA Business Plan, to be adopted in January 2012 and covering:
- Income and expenditure projective
  - The approach to the investment programme
  - Key priorities for management of the housing stock
  - The involvement of residents in planning programmes and services.
98. Priority investment works will be those to meet statutory and health and safety obligations, such as fire assessments, and those to meet the Decent Homes Standard. The latter will vary from property to property, but could include replacing kitchens or bathrooms, renewing window and doors, rewiring or renewing boilers or central heating.
99. Other priorities will be void works, adaptations, works to improve thermal efficiency and other improvements, such as the upgrading of communal areas, which residents believe are important for the quality of life.

## **Energy Efficiency**

100. The Council has undertaken a number of projects to improve energy efficiency in its housing stock, including a Thermal Imaging Project to map heat loss in 95%

of homes. The Council is aiming for an average SAP rating of 69 for its housing stock. It is anticipated that if additional sums become available within the HRA, it will be possible to take further advantage of CERT or CESP and make further progress on energy efficiency.

### **The Approach to Estate Regeneration**

101. Most council homes in the Borough are on low to medium rise flatted estates located in areas of otherwise privately owned housing. As long as increased investment can be secured most of these buildings will continue to provide homes for Kingston residents in the long term.
102. However, one of the Council's place shaping priorities is Estate Regeneration. This is because there are four larger estates where, over the next few years, the Council will be looking to discuss with residents opportunities for further development and for changing the configuration of homes and the estate environment.
103. These estates are at Cambridge Road, Sheephouse Way, Cumberland House and School Lane.

### **Planning for Sheltered Housing**

104. Nearly 900 council homes are sheltered housing for older people. Some of these are of good quality and very popular. Others are less so.
105. Over the life of this strategy the aim will be to have fewer sheltered homes overall to reflect the level of demand for this type of accommodation, but to ensure they are of good quality. The planning for the volume and type of sheltered housing required in the long term will take place within the review of Older Peoples' Housing.

### **Asset Management**

106. The Council will review HRA assets to ensure it is making best use of them and identify areas for change. This might include disposal where an asset does not fit with the rest of the portfolio or small infill development on estates.

### **Repairs Service**

107. One of the core services provided to council tenants and leaseholders is repairs. The existing contracts are subject to retendering or, potentially, extension in 2013. The approach to these contracts will be reviewed in 2011/12.

### **The Residents Compact**

108. A new Residents' Compact for Kingston was signed by resident representatives and the Council in 2010. At its heart is the active involvement and participation

of residents in taking decisions about services and monitoring how they are operating. The operation of the Compact will be reviewed annually.

### **Local Standards**

109. The Government has established a statutory framework for the standards of service to be provided by social housing landlords, including local authorities.
110. Its main theme is accountability to residents; an annual report to residents will set out how well the landlord is performing against a set of national standards.
111. In addition, the Council is required to agree with residents a 'Local offer' or set of local standards. In Kingston, these were agreed with residents in April 2011 and feature:
  - customer service standards
  - choice about accessing services
  - setting up Estate Management Agreements to give choice on how services are delivered, including repairs and caretaking
  - a menu of opportunities for resident involvement.
112. Performance on these will also be covered in the Annual Report to residents.

### **What we will do**

- Implement Self-Financing of the Housing Revenue Account in Kingston
- Develop and publish a 30-year Business Plan for Council homes in Kingston, including plans for the investment programme.
- Increase investment in Council homes and bring them up to the Decent Homes Standard
- Increase the energy efficiency of Council homes.
- In collaboration with residents, develop a new approach to investment planning and regeneration on estates, beginning with at least one pilot scheme.
- Change the use of poorer quality sheltered housing schemes, within the framework of the Review of Older Peoples' Housing
- In collaboration with residents, set and monitor local management standards for council homes and implement the Residents' Compact
- Review the effectiveness and operation of Repairs Contracts.

## **Theme 4: Improve the Quality and Provision of Private Sector Homes**

113. Most residents in Kingston live in privately-owned homes and most of these are in good condition. The responsibility for the condition and energy efficiency of

these homes lies with the owner, but the Partnership has a number of direct and indirect roles in encouraging high standards.

### **Our Objectives are to:**

- Promote private renting as a long term housing option for communities in Kingston
- Promote affordable home ownership
- Encourage the improvement of the physical condition of privately owned homes, particularly their energy efficiency and safety
- Tackle fuel poverty
- Promote good landlord/tenant relations and good management standards
- Facilitate access for lower income groups into the private rented sector

### **Condition of Private Sector Homes**

114. Although most private homes are in good condition, it is estimated by the Building Research Establishment that 42% do not meet the Decent Homes Standard, principally because of inadequate thermal insulation or energy efficiency.

### **Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRs)**

115. HHSRS is the risk assessment procedure for residential properties. A Category I hazard, once established, triggers a duty on the local authority to take appropriate enforcement action.
116. In the period 2007-2010 the Council's Property Inspection Team removed 130 Category I hazards through the provision of grants and enforcement action.

### **Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO's)**

117. The presence of Kingston University and its student population gives rise to a large number of HMOs in the Borough. The standard varies significantly and in recognition of this, Kingston was one of the first London Boroughs to introduce a registration scheme. This was superseded in April 2011 by a mandatory licensing scheme.
118. The council has been active in licensing HMOs, with 182 licensed over the last 5 years. However, there are many HMOs which fall outside the mandatory scheme, mainly because they are only 2 storeys. In 2011/12 the Council will review its policy to establish whether an additional licensing scheme is necessary.

### **Empty Private Sector Homes**

119. Like all London Boroughs Kingston has a number of private homes which have been empty for a long time. These can often have an impact on the wider environment and are a waste of resources.
120. The Partnership wishes to reduce the number of empty homes over the period 2005-2010 a total of 442 private sector homes have been brought back into use as a result of Council action. However, more can be done and this Strategy therefore provides for the production of a Comprehensive Action Plan on empty homes.

### **Direct Funding for Private Owners**

121. Over the last few years the Council has successfully operated programmes of assistance to improve the condition of private homes in the Borough. Subject to the availability of funding, we will wish to continue this funding to:
- Provide adaptations for residents with disabilities
  - Improve energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty
  - Bring empty homes back into use
  - Allow for enforcement, including in HMOs.

### **Extending Housing Choice**

122. Alongside the Choice-Based Lettings scheme, the Council helps to increase housing choice to local tenants and residents with a number of private sector options:
- The Tenant Finder Service, for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness; over 960 tenancies have been created through this scheme
  - Home Finder – for overcrowded social housing tenants who wish to move to a private home as an alternative to waiting for a transfer to larger social housing
  - Home Finder – Qualifying Offers, a permanent re-housing option for accepted homeless households.

### **Accredited Landlords**

123. Kingston is a member of the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS) and support accreditation as good practice. A more pro-active approach is now being taken, including training for landlords and considering making accreditation a condition of letting via the Tenant Finder scheme. The Council is working jointly with the University to investigate whether accreditation can be used more widely to raise standards in the sector

## **Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty in the Private Rented Sector**

124. As part of the Kingston Plan the Partnership has made a commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in line with national and regional targets. The Council is committed to reduce by 24% carbon emissions from its operations by 2015.
125. The Joint Annual Public Report produced by NHS Kingston and the Council shows the link between health and climate change and includes practical recommendations such as providing decent homes to address both issues.
126. A household is said to be in 'fuel poverty' if it needs to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel. In Kingston, the highest levels of fuel poverty are thought to be in the private rented sector where the average SAP rating for property is as low as 55 out of 120.
127. A number of energy efficiency and fuel poverty initiatives are planned from 2011 from 2011 onwards, including the RE-NEW Project providing home visits to residents in the Hook and Old Malden areas to give advice and encourage grant take-up and...

## **Raising Awareness of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency**

128. The responsibility for raising standards of energy efficiency in the private domestic sector lies primarily with owners. The Partnership has a role in promoting awareness of the issue and making it as easy as possible for owners to take the necessary steps in their own home. This strategy includes an information programme aimed at meeting this objective.

### **What we will do:**

- Devise an advice programme aimed at private owners to encourage energy efficiency in their homes
- Tackle fuel poverty through the RE-NEW Project of targeted visits to residents
- Devise an Action Plan to bring empty private homes back into use
- License and promote the good management of Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Target public capital resources at providing Disabled Facility Grants, Support enforcement work, bringing empty homes back into use and tackling fuel poverty
- Provide advice to owners, landlords and tenants as part of a coordinated Housing Advice service
- Promote good standards of management by encouraging landlord accreditation

- Promote the Tenant Finder Service to increase access to the private rented sector for low-income households.

## **Theme 5: Encourage Community Engagement and Sustainable Communities**

129. Our objectives are to:

- Ensure residents have the opportunity to take part in the development of Housing Plans which affect them
- Increase the awareness of housing issues and the need for better and more affordable homes in the Borough
- Ensure that housing programmes contribute to other service areas and help build sustainable communities.

### **Resident Involvement**

130. The Council will continue with its existing formal mechanism to involve council tenants and leaseholders and private tenants and owners in the development of services. These include the Housing Consultative Committee and the Private Sector Housing Consultative Committee.

### **Increasing Public Awareness of Housing Issues in Kingston**

131. If the Partnership stakeholders are well-informed about local and national housing issues they will make a valuable and active contribution to decisions about Housing in Kingston. Via this strategy we will upgrade the RBK website to improve information on housing issues. As an innovation, we will pilot a project to increase the knowledge amongst young people of Housing issues and constraints in the Borough.

### **Building Sustainable Communities**

132. The Kingston Housing Strategy aims to support the building of sustainable communities by:

- Tackling fuel poverty
- Encouraging choice in accessing social housing and private rented homes and customer engagement in services
- Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour
- Promoting measures through our Housing programmes which reduce health inequality
- Contribute to addressing child poverty in Kingston.

133. The strategy supports the ambitions in the Kingston Plan to mould Kingston as a place by:
- Promoting investment in the built environment and improvements to the quality of homes
  - Planning for the delivery of high quality new homes in appropriate locations in the Borough
  - Opening a dialogue with residents about the long term future of some of the larger housing estates in the Borough.

### **Neighbourhood Plans**

134. The Localism Bill before Parliament in early 2011 sets the stage for important changes in community action and planning including the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans. The Partnership will ensure Housing Issues play a full part in their development.

### **Localism in Action – the Norbiton Pilot**

135. Kingston has agreed to pilot a programme called Local Integration of Services (LIS) in the Norbiton Ward. Key themes will include “Employment and Skills”, “Family and Life Chances” and “Financial Support”. The Council’s Housing Service will work closely with Neighbourhood Managers and other partners to ensure a full Housing input.
136. LIS work will be a key focus of attention for the Council’s Equalities and Community Engagement Team, which aims to reduce health inequalities by looking at how a wide range of factors, including housing, education and income affect long term health.

### **Health Inequalities and the Links with Housing**

137. There is a link between housing conditions and physical and mental health. Plans for improving health by improving housing conditions are included in the Public Health Annual Reports. The Council and NHS Kingston have collaborated to conduct Participating Needs Assessments (PNA’s).
138. In one PNA, poverty, housing issues and difficulty with spoken English emerged as the main factors which shape the health of minority ethnic communities in Kingston. A Needs Assessment of the Refugee community in Kingston identified a number of Housing issues, including overcrowding and access to advice as areas of concern.
139. Some of the specific initiatives set out in this strategy, for example increased investment in Council homes, reducing overcrowding and tackling fuel poverty in the private sector will contribute directly to the improvement of health.

### **Mitigating the Effects of Child Poverty**

140. Using the national definition of child poverty nearly 5000 children live in poverty in Kingston, with the highest numbers in Norbiton Ward. The One Council Kingston Child Poverty Strategy will be published in 2011.
141. There are close links between child poverty and poor housing. National data shows children who live in poverty are almost twice as likely to be in bad housing and children living in bad housing are almost twice as likely to suffer from poor health as other children.
142. This Strategy will ensure that close joint working between the agencies involved maximises the impact on child poverty of housing activities and programmes.

### **Crime Reduction and Community Safety**

143. The Safer Kingston Partnership bring together key agencies in the Borough to reduce crime, disorder, substance misuse and re-offending in Kingston. Amongst the successes are a 10% reduction in crime in Kingston, between 2007/8 and 2009/10. Support for the one stop shop will allow victims of domestic abuse to get advice from a number of agencies, and the reduction of anti-social behaviour in Kingston Town Centre.
144. The Council take vigorous action to tackle crimes and hate crimes. Vigorous action is also taken to tackle anti-social behaviour amongst its own tenants. Since 2008, 11 tenants have been subject to ASBOs or Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and in some cases bad behaviour has led to eviction.

### **What we will do:**

- Fully involve stakeholders in the development and monitoring of the Housing Strategy
- Through the Residents Compact and the Housing Consultative Committee consult and involve RBK tenants and leaseholders in the development of services
- Ensure full consideration of Housing issues within Neighbourhood Plans
- Ensure the full inclusion of Housing issues within the work of the Norbiton LIP
- Develop the Housing elements of the RBK website to increase awareness of Housing issues in the Borough
- Via the LIP and in particular in relation to temporary accommodation, produce specific proposals to reduce health inequality insofar as it relates to homeless households or social housing tenants
- Ensure appropriate links are made between the Housing Strategy and the emerging Child Poverty Strategy

- Ensure that a full Housing input is made into crime reduction initiatives to improve community safety.

## **Theme 6: Develop Effective Strategic and Operational Partnerships**

- I45. Housing is a key element of the lives of all residents of Kingston. Poor housing can act as a barrier to an improved quality of life and the effectiveness of other services. For this reason, joint working between Housing and other services is a vital element of work of the Partnership.
- I46. Our Objective is to:
- Harness the contribution of all agencies within the Partnership to meet a common set of housing goals.

### **Key Strategic Partnerships**

- I47. The Strategy deals in detail with the Council's partnerships with:
- Registered Social Landlords and developers in delivering new homes
  - Residents in both public and private sectors
  - Contractor who repair homes
  - The University and supporting high standards in the private sector
  - The voluntary sector, in addressing homelessness.

### **Regional and National Partners**

- I48. A number of external partners are central to the delivery of more and better homes; the Mayor for London and the Greater London Authority, the Home and Communities Agency, the Tenant Services Authority and Communities and Local Government.

### **Best Practice in Joint Working**

- I49. Much of the joint working between agencies in Kingston takes place at an operational level in Kingston; it is well-developed and successful. These make a real difference to the lives of individual clients and the surrounding community, for example the placement of a resident with mental health problems in the right type of supported accommodation in an appropriate location.
- I50. There are a large number of these joint working arrangements. For example, the MAPPAs are multi-agency meetings looking at the individual cases of high-risk offenders.

151. Given the difficult financial climate in which all public agencies are now operating it is important to ensure that these arrangements are working cost-effectively. To this end the Strategy provides for a review of the effectiveness of existing partnership arrangements.

#### **What we will do**

- Consolidated existing joint working arrangements, partnership arrangements and protocols between Housing and other service areas and promote the role of the voluntary sector in providing services, advice and assistance.

## **Theme 7: Efficiently Manage Resources and Increase Capacity**

Our Objectives are to:

- Optimise the use of the housing resources available in Kingston and maximise external funding coming into the Borough
- Be realistic about the limits of our resources and capacity and establish clear priorities for the use of the resources we have.

#### **Using the Capacity of Partners**

152. In addition to using its own resources, the Council will provide leadership, strategic direction and commitment in developing and implementing the Housing Strategy. We will be looking to our local partners such as RSL, residents and the voluntary sector and external partners such as the GLA and HCA to bring their expertise, experience and resources to bear.

#### **What we will do**

- Provide leadership, strategic direction and commitment in implementing the Housing Strategy
- Harness the capacity of regional and national agencies such as the HCA, GLA and Communities and Local Government
- Via the HCA and RSL partners, attract investment resources into Kingston for new homes and the improvement of private sector dwellings
- Seek to use the value of Council and other publicly owned assets to increase investment in new and existing homes.