

## RBK HOUSING INFORMATION

### Introduction

The Housing Strategy is being developed by Kingston Council and its partners in the Kingston Strategic Partnership. The full draft can be viewed below. It supports the aims of the Kingston Plan (the Community Plan) and its vision of making Kingston one of the best places to live and work. One of the main objectives of the Kingston Plan is to increase the supply of housing and its affordability.

### Why housing is important

Whether you're a home-owner, a tenant or a landlord, housing is central to your quality of life.

- You may recognise the need for more homes, but also be concerned that the attractiveness of Kingston is protected and enhanced.
- You may be concerned about where your children will live.
- If you're a **home-owner**, you may be concerned about improving the energy efficiency of your home.
- If you're an **employer**, you will have an interest in where your employees can live.
- If you're a **council tenant**, you are probably keen to see the condition of your home being improved.
- If you're a **private landlord or tenant** you will want to see good quality homes that people can afford.
- If you're a **student**, you will be keen to see a supply of good-quality affordable accommodation.

Whatever your situation, your views on the housing priorities for the Borough over the next few years are important.

Kingston is a successful place in housing terms as well as economically, socially and culturally. Nevertheless, the Borough faces some challenges:

- 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.
- The condition of some public and private sector homes is not satisfactory and many are not energy-efficient.
- Some Kingston residents live in overcrowded or insecure circumstances and need somewhere better to live.
- Some residents do not have a home which is suitable for them.
- Some residents need specific types of support within their accommodation.

### Increasing the supply of homes

**Over the last few years, the population of Kingston has increased significantly and this trend is set to continue. More homes are needed to buy and to rent.**

At the same time, the Council and its partners are determined to protect and enhance the existing character of the Borough and its amenities and effectiveness. There is a particular need for more affordable homes to buy and rent for people who cannot meet the high costs of homes in the Borough. Plans for new homes are included in the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy, which is Kingston's planning strategy and policy document.

It confirms that 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. 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. The Council wants to maximise the delivery of new affordable homes, particularly on publicly-owned land. The LDF seeks to allow the

delivery of 2,000 new affordable housing units in the period 2012/13 to 2026/27. Larger family homes will be a priority. In the two years ending in March 2012, it is anticipated 190 new affordable homes will have been provided. The Government has changed the funding arrangements for new affordable housing. The new Affordable Rent” model will mean rents are substantially higher in new homes than in existing social housing. The Council has agreed with its Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners to work pro-actively together to make this new model work in the interests of Kingston residents and to encourage the development of sites.

### **What we plan to do**

- Deliver a good supply of new homes in Kingston, of all tenures and in suitable locations while protecting the existing character of the Borough.
- Give a priority to family-sized homes.
- Place a particular emphasis on new affordable homes and maximise the public funding for housing coming into Kingston.
- Assist residents on a range of incomes into affordable home-ownership.
- Work with RSLs, the Greater London Authority and the Homes and Communities Agency to make the new Affordable Rent” model work for Kingston residents.

### **Improving council homes**

**Kingston Council owns and manages 4,800 homes. In addition there are 1,600 leaseholders in council-owned blocks. Most of the homes are low or medium-rise flats, are structurally sound and have a good, long-term future.**

Due to Government financial restrictions, investment in repairs and improvements has been too low in recent years. As a result, 34% of council homes do not meet the Government’s minimum Decent Homes Standard and investment of £191m is needed over the next 30 years. However, from April 2012, the financial rules will change. The Council will keep all the rents paid by tenants, rather than pass one third over to the Government. In exchange, the Council will take on an additional debt, currently estimated at £105m. It is anticipated the new system will mean an increase in investment in council homes and more effective long-term planning and management. As a result, the Council has committed itself to bring all its homes up to the Decent Homes Standard by 2016. The priority work will be to meet statutory and health and safety obligations, such as fire assessments. Decent Homes works will vary from property to property but could include replacing kitchens or bathrooms, renewing windows and doors. After that, it will be important to improve thermal efficiency and communal areas. Although most council homes have a long-term future, there are some larger estates where changes might be possible or desirable. Over the next few years, the Council will be looking to discuss these opportunities with residents. Nearly 900 council homes are sheltered housing for older people. Some of these are of good quality and popular while others are not. During the next four years the aim will be to have fewer sheltered homes, but to increase their quality. This will be considered within a wider review of Older People’s Housing. The Government has established new standards of service to be provided by social landlords, including local housing authorities. The Council has also agreed local standards with residents, covering customer service, resident involvement, and local estate agreements to give residents choice about how services such as caretaking and repairs are delivered.

### **What we plan to do**

- Implement the new financial system for council housing in Kingston and produce a new 30 year Business Plan for council homes.
- Increase investment in council homes and bring them up to the Decent Homes Standard.

- Increase the energy efficiency of council homes.
- With residents, discuss options for regeneration on larger estates.
- Within a wider review of Older People's Housing in the Borough, change the use of poorer quality sheltered housing schemes.
- With residents, set and implement local management standards.
- Review the effectiveness and operation of Repairs Contracts.

## **Improving private homes**

**Most residents in Kingston live in privately-owned homes which they own themselves or rent from a private landlord. House prices and rents in Kingston are high and some people receive help with their housing costs.**

Increasingly, the private rented sector caters for a wide range of income groups and is a long-term option even for people on low or modest incomes. Most private housing in the borough is in good condition. However, 42% of these homes do not meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard, mainly because they are not energy efficient. Individual owners are responsible for the condition of their property; the role of public agencies and of this strategy is to raise awareness of climate change and the importance of energy efficiency and to provide advice and information on the options available. A household is said to be in fuel poverty" if it has to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel; in Kingston it is believed the highest levels of fuel poverty are in the private rented sector. In these situations, there is a case for the Council to take a more pro-active approach to improve the energy efficiency of homes. As in all London Boroughs there are a number of private homes in Kingston which have been empty for a long time. These often affect the local area and are a waste of resources. In the last five years over 400 homes have been brought back into use as a result of council action but more remains to be done. Public money to help owners who cannot afford to improve their homes is very limited and will need to be carefully targeted.

The private rented sector in Kingston can provide accommodation for residents of all income groups, including those who might otherwise occupy social housing. The Council has a role to play in facilitating this access to a private rented home. It is important that private landlords in the Borough manage their property to a good standard. Local landlords are working with the Council and the University to improve standards through an accreditation system. Kingston also has many houses in multiple occupation; the Council has a duty to ensure these are of a good standard.

## **What we plan to do**

- Launch an advice programme for private owners to encourage energy-efficient homes.
- Tackle fuel poverty through the RE-NEW project of targeted visits to residents to provide advice and assistance.
- Create an action plan to bring empty private homes back into use.
- License and promote good management of houses in multiple occupation.
- Target limited public resources at providing disabled facilities grants, bringing empty homes into use and tackling fuel poverty.
- Encourage good standards through the accreditation of landlords.
- Promote the Tenant Finder Service to increase access to the private rented sector for low-income households.

## **Meeting housing needs**

**The majority of people in Kingston have a good home that they can afford to live in. However, a minority of residents do not have a suitable or secure home or need support in living in the home they have.** The Supporting People Programme in Kingston helps provide 1,617 units of supported housing; the client group areas receiving most

funding are mental health, homeless people, people with learning disabilities and older people. Providing move-on accommodation is a major challenge and a more co-ordinated approach is needed for non-priority homeless households and young people. As people are living longer, their housing needs are also changing. A fresh look is needed in the Borough at the housing needs of older people; both the services needed to allow them to remain independent in their own homes and what specialist housing is required. This includes plans for the Council's own sheltered housing stock. Living in overcrowded conditions can seriously affect other aspects of the quality of life such as health or educational attainment. The Council's existing Overcrowding Strategy has already succeeded in re-housing 70 tenants in better homes. Helping tenants to move out of under-occupied homes contributes to this effort by freeing-up larger homes. Homelessness is an issue in Kingston but there have been successes over the last few years. Joint work by the Council and the voluntary sector has increasingly prevented homelessness. The number of households accepted as homeless by the Council dropped from 230 in 2006/7 to 140 in 2009/10. Less than one third of those who apply as homeless are accepted. Where homelessness occurs the priority is to minimise the use of inadequate and expensive B&B hotels as temporary accommodation. A comprehensive Housing Advice and Options Service is available for private occupiers and owners aimed at preventing homelessness. For residents who are not entitled to accommodation from the Council, the voluntary sector provides a valuable network of services, in partnership with the Council. However, there is scope for the better co-ordination of these services through the Homelessness Forum. Rough sleeping is at a low level in Kingston compared to other London Boroughs; probably 10 people or less. In 2010 a 10-point plan was developed to address rough sleeping in the Borough and more recently the "No Second Night Out" initiative was launched by the Mayor of London. This Strategy has been produced at a time when the Government has announced fundamental changes in benefits, social housing tenancies and homelessness powers for local authorities. A co-ordinated and comprehensive response to them is required by housing agencies in the Borough. Some groups within the community are particularly affected by poor or insecure housing; for example, black and ethnic minority people are disproportionately represented among homeless households. The Housing Strategy proposes a new equalities plan to mitigate the effects of housing inequality in Kingston.

### **What we plan to do**

- Use the Supporting People Programme to provide supported housing, particularly for older people, people with learning disabilities, homeless people and mental health clients.
- Build a comprehensive plan for housing for older people.
- Reduce overcrowding and under-occupancy in social housing.
- Minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast.
- Strengthen the role of the Homelessness Forum and develop prevention, referral and move-on services for young people and non-statutory homeless people.
- Implement the 10-point plan on Rough Sleeping and contribute to the Mayor of London's "No Second Night Out" project.
- Produce a consolidated plan responding to changes in benefits, homelessness and tenancy legislation.
- Develop a local equalities plan for housing services.

### **Building partnerships and communities**

**Housing is a key element in the lives of all Kingston residents. Poor housing can act as a barrier to an improved quality of life and the effectiveness of other services such as health and education.** For this reason it is important that there is a good link-up between housing and other services and that there is a good level of awareness of housing issues and opportunities. **Kingston has agreed to pilot a programme called Local Integration of Services (LIS) in Norbiton. This will look at the local impact of different services and**

**housing will be an important element of the project.** There is a clear link between housing conditions and physical and mental health. Some of the plans in the Strategy, for example tackling fuel poverty, can lead directly to an improvement in health. Similarly, there is a link between child poverty and housing; children who live in poverty are twice as likely to be in bad housing. It is important to ensure that joint working maximises the impact of housing programmes on child poverty. Housing agencies are closely involved in the Safer Kingston Partnership, which aims to reduce crime and disorder in the Borough. It is a high priority within the Housing Strategy to closely involve residents in the development of services. There are already a range of mechanisms for doing this, including a Compact between the Council and tenants and leaseholders.

### **What we plan to do**

- Develop the Kingston Council website to raise awareness of housing issues in the borough.
- Continue the Housing Consultative Committees for council tenants and leaseholders and private tenants and landlords.
- Ensure housing issues are fully considered within the Norbiton Local Integrated Services pilot project.
- Produce specific proposals to reduce health inequality, particularly for households in temporary accommodation.
- Ensure appropriate links are made between the Housing and Child poverty strategies.
- Ensure a full housing input into crime reduction and community safety initiatives.