

BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN
ENHANCED HOUSING OPTIONS
OVERVIEW AND ACTION PLAN
MARCH 2009

Overview

Background

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council has been selected by the government to be a trailblazer authority for the delivery of an enhanced housing options service; this overview and action plan shows how the council aims to go about developing the existing services offered to people in housing need to provide a truly holistic response that cuts across the housing, employment and social inclusion agendas.

Key Facts about Blackburn with Darwen

Health

- 20% of the population have a limiting long-term illness
- 11% of the population receive Incapacity Benefit

Economic Activity

- 67% of the population are in employment
- 3% of the population are in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance

Social Deprivation

- In 2004 the Borough was the 34th most deprived borough in England
- By 2007 it had become the 17th most deprived

Housing Stock and Tenure

- There are 59,070 homes in Blackburn with Darwen
- 72% are owner occupied
- 20% are owned by housing associations
- 8% are privately rented
- 20% of homes are considered to be 'low demand'
- 17% of homes are considered to be 'unfit'
- 20% of privately owned property is empty

Need

- There are just over 7,500 people registered with the BwithUs Choice Based Lettings scheme
- Levels of overcrowding are noticeably higher than national and regional averages
- Survey data suggests that 6,923 (12.5%) households are living in unsuitable housing
- It is estimated that there are 1,279 existing households that cannot afford market housing, living in unsuitable housing and who require a move to alternative accommodation. This represents 2.3% of all existing households in the Borough

Sources: Pennine Lancashire Baseline Data (Blackburn with Darwen Housing Needs Survey 2008, Nomis Labour Market Statistics 2008, Census 2001, Land Registry 2008, HIP 2006, Elevate LIS 2007, Mid Year Population Estimates 2007)

Strategic Links

By delivering an enhanced housing options service, the council and its partners will also work towards achieving the aims of a number of local, regional and national strategies.

Some examples are given below:

The enhanced housing options service is very closely linked with the **Blackburn with Darwen Homelessness Strategy (2008-13)**. The strategy contains specific reference to developing enhanced housing options and exploring the feasibility of developing an integrated housing and employment project for the most disadvantaged. The strategy emphasises the priority of preventing homelessness and the targeted interventions mentioned in the action plan will strengthen existing prevention measures.

Two of the council's strategic aims from the most recent **Housing Strategy (2005-08)** are to improve choice and access to affordable good quality housing and to address vulnerable peoples housing and support needs.

Successful delivery of the enhanced housing options service will directly impact on the **Blackburn with Darwen Local Area Agreement (2008-13)**, in particular indicators 153 - working age people claiming benefits in the worst performing areas and 117 – number of 16 to 18 year olds not in training, education or employment.

The development of a **sub regional Choice Based Lettings scheme** offers an ideal opportunity for the council and its partners to share its learning and successes in delivering enhanced housing options in the social sector with the other Pennine Lancashire authorities and this is specifically referred to in the action plan.

By addressing issues of employment, access to decent private sector accommodation and the needs of older people, the enhanced housing options service will also contribute to the aims of the **East Lancashire Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder**.

The Borough does not have a rough sleeping problem and, on current performance, will meet the **2010 Temporary Accommodation Target** but youth homelessness continues to be an issue and the council is investing significant resources into work with young people. A multi agency assessment and referral panel is being set up to enable early identification of young people at risk and a more holistic response to be made; this will include advice on training and employment options. The enhanced housing options service will therefore directly contribute to achieving the aims of the **Blackburn with Darwen Young People's Housing Strategy** and the **National Youth Homelessness Strategy**.

Current Services

The council currently provides an integrated advice service concentrating on the needs of vulnerable people that includes housing advice, court representation, money advice / debt counselling and welfare benefits advice.

In addition the Neighbourhood Services Section provides specialist advice service for landlords and tenants in the private sector, which are backed up by enforcement powers, and home maintenance, energy efficiency and home safety advice services.

The council has achieved some notable successes in homelessness prevention and the development of a Choice Based Lettings scheme.

Homelessness Prevention Successes

The Borough has maintained its homelessness strategy through annual updates. Since 2003 the successes in terms of prevention include:

- Rent Deposit Scheme
- Private landlord / tenant mediation
- Partnership work on targeted health services for homeless people
- Web based directory of homelessness services
- 100% use of Discretionary Housing Payment
- Sanctuary scheme
- Money advice services for homeless hostels

Choice Based Lettings Successes

The Borough was one of the government's original pilots for Choice Based Lettings (CBL), and now has a mature and very successful scheme (BwithUS) which works as a partnership between the Council and the 4 main social landlords.

Ninety per cent of all social housing is allocated via the scheme. All of the vacant property owned by Twin Valley Homes (the LSVT RSL) and at least half of that owned by the other main social landlords is let via BwithUS.

Obligation to participate in the scheme is laid out in the Borough's Preferred Partner Agreement with the social landlords.

As mentioned above, the Borough will shortly be joining with four of the five other Pennine Lancashire authorities in a sub regional Choice Based Lettings scheme that is based on the Bwithus model.

Enhanced Housing Options

The Blackburn with Darwen Enhanced Housing Options Service has five themes:

- A. Developing options for people seeking or living in social housing
- B. Developing options for people in the private rented sector
- C. Providing information, advice and guidance on access to benefits, learning and work
- D. Improving access to information on care and repair services for older people
- E. Developing housing options for vulnerable young people

The key actions under each theme are summarised below:

Developing options for people seeking or living in social rented housing

A mechanism to identify applicants for social housing who may benefit from enhanced housing options service will be developed in partnership with social landlords, Jobcentre Plus, the Integrated Youth Service and the Lifelong Learning Partnership

Increasing housing options in the private rented sector

It is proposed to offer a package to landlords that will include:

- Possible development of 'good tenant' scheme
- Increased access to the rent bond scheme.
- Access to the Choice Based Lettings advertising scheme
- Training in property management
- Possible offer of RSL to act as managing agent.

Providing information, advice and guidance on access to benefits, learning and work

Long term unemployed people in housing need will be signposted to an Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) officer for personal one to one assessment, advice and agreeing a personal action plan. Following this assessment people will be referred on to:

- Education and training opportunities
- Benefits Adviser to do a 'better off calculation'
- Housing Needs Officer to advise on housing options

Improving access to information on care and repair services for older people

A specially designated Care and Repair Information and Access Officer will signpost vulnerable older and disabled people to appropriate agencies
For in depth advice on:

- Repairs and adaptations which may support an option to 'stay put'
- Other housing options

Developing housing options for vulnerable young people

Enhanced services for young people will include:

- Establishment of multi agency team for vulnerable young people with housing needs
- Commissioning of mediation services
- Delivery of housing information services in schools and further education establishments
- Delivery of housing related support for vulnerable young parents

All housing options will be promoted through the Borough's 'One Stop Shop' customer service centre, Housing Needs and the CBL 'BwithUs' scheme.

Project Management and Monitoring

A project coordinator has been appointed and will have the following responsibilities:

- Agreeing baseline figures and outcome indicators with partners
- Designing and collating quarterly monitoring reports for DCLG
- Updating the action plan
- Liaising with other housing options services, particularly 'Trailblazers'
- Consulting with Elevate and Pennine Lancashire authorities on roll out of the service to them
- Developing an exit strategy

Quarterly performance reports will set out progress against actions and quarterly progress meetings will be held with the CLG Specialist Advisor and a full review of the service will be produced in June 2010. An evaluation of the whole project will be produced by May 2011.

Partnership Working

The council has developed this action plan in partnership with key local stakeholder agencies via a steering group which will maintain the partnership approach in delivering the service.

The main partner agencies are:

- Twin Valley Homes
- Lifelong Learning Partnership
- Jobcentre Plus
- Young People's Service

Exit Strategy

Throughout the life of the project the project coordinator will be drafting an exit strategy that will aim to enable the essential elements of the service to remain in place after the cessation of the initial funding in 2011.

It is not possible to give precise details of the exit strategy at this point as it will be dictated by developments in the service over the next two years but it is expected that the following developments and services will remain in place.

- The mechanism for identifying people who may benefit from enhanced housing options once developed will not require any significant further funding
- The revised accredited private landlord scheme will be funded by the council
- The multi agency team for young people is funded by the Council
- The post of information, advice and guidance officer, if successful, is likely to remain as a mainstream post within the lifelong learning partnership
- The benefits advice service is, if successful, also likely to attract mainstream funding

- The post of older person's housing options officer post is designed to develop capacity within existing agencies and is not seen as a permanent position
- The support service for young parents is contingent on separate funding bid

A Note on the Economic Downturn

The current economic downturn will undoubtedly have an impact on the service as industry and commerce contract making employment opportunities scarcer; the service may have to focus more on education and training opportunities as a result.

This is expected to mainly affect young people and working age adults, services for older people are less likely to be affected.

The Council is actively engaged with the Government Mortgage Rescue Scheme.

A Note on the Action Plan – Performance Monitoring

The council and its partners have recognised that there is at present insufficient robust data to set accurate baselines from which to measure progress against some of the targets in the action plan. The project coordinator will be working closely with partner agencies over the first three months of the project to set provisional baselines and targets by the first meeting with the CLG in July 2009. The establishment of data collection systems mentioned in the action plan will enable more accurate baselines and targets to be set before the proposed full implementation of the service with the recruitment of delivery officers by September 2009. Performance indicators are provided as an appendix to the action plan.

A Note on the Action Plan – Timescales

The plan mainly contains short term actions for the first year of the project; it is expected that developments in the first year will inform the action plan for year two; as part of the ongoing review process new actions will be added as appropriate throughout the life of the project.

Action Plan

THEME A: Options for people seeking or living in social rented housing

Current Service	Action	Who will Deliver	Target Outcome	Milestones	End date	Resources Needed	Progress
We do not have enough robust data on the number of people in the Borough who might benefit from an enhanced housing options service	Incorporate questions on economic activity, disability and employment status in the new BwithUS application form	Head of Housing Twin Valley Homes	Current and accurate data available from which to establish a robust baseline to measure success of interventions	New application form in use by July 2009	Data base complete by September 2009	Staff time Printing costs Internal funding in place	New application form for sub regional Choice Based Lettings now in use
	Carry out a survey of people currently on the BwithUS register who may benefit from an enhanced housing options service			Data collection commenced			Survey now underway potential clients being identified
	Agree a protocol for identifying clients of Lifelong Learning and Job Centre Plus who may benefit from support	Job Centre Plus Manager Acting Neighbourhood Manager - S.E. / IAG Manager		Protocol agreed by July 2009 Data collection commenced			

THEME B: Increasing housing options in the private rented sector

Current Service	Action	Who will Deliver	Target Outcome	Milestones	End Date	Resources Needed	Progress
The landlord accreditation scheme needs to be developed and promoted to landlords	Develop landlord accreditation scheme	Housing Standards Manager Housing Needs Manager	Scheme in Place Landlords becoming accredited	Scheme criteria developed by July 2009	Scheme in place by September 2009	Staff time Internal funding in place £5,000 CLG Funding	
	Promote scheme		Scheme being actively promoted to landlords	Key landlords identified by September 2009	Scheme being actively promoted to landlords by November 2009	Staff time Internal funding in place £5,000 CLG	
There is no central mechanism for advertising good quality private sector housing	Advertise affordable and decent private sector property owned by accredited landlords via the BwithUS scheme	Head of Housing Twin Valley Homes Housing Standards Manager	Accredited property advertised via BwithUS	Potential landlords identified by September 2009	Property being advertised by November 2009	Staff time Internal funding in place £5,000 CLG	

THEME C: Providing information, advice and guidance on access to benefits, learning and work

Current Service	Action	Who will Deliver	Target Outcomes	Milestones	End Date	Resources Needed	Progress
The enhanced housing options service is contingent on the appointment of an information, advice and guidance officer	Nominate an information, advice and guidance officer from within Lifelong Learning to provide advice and guidance	Acting Neighbourhood Manager - S.E. / IAG Manager	Officer in post Enhanced housing options assessments and referrals being carried out	Officer identified by July 2009	Officer in post by September 2009	Staff time Internal funding in place £30,000 CLG funding	Officer in post as of 1 st April 2009 Office space at Twin Valley Homes available
The information and guidance officer will require specialist training in benefits and housing legislation	Provide in depth training to information and guidance officer	Housing Needs Manager Head of Customer Operations Acting Neighbourhood Manager - S.E. / IAG Manager	Information and guidance officer competent to deliver service	Training to commence in July 2009	Training to be complete by September 2009 and updated as required thereafter	Staff time Internal funding in place £5,000 CLG funding	
A housing needs officer who will be responsible for delivering the housing element of the enhanced options service needs to be identified	Identify housing needs officer	Housing Needs Manager	Officer identified and ready to deliver enhanced housing options service Increase in number of people accessing housing	Officer identified by May 2009	Officer in post by July 2009	Staff time Internal funding in place £5,000 CLG funding	

Current Service	Action	Who will Deliver	Target Outcomes	Milestones	End Date	Resources Needed	Progress
A benefits advisor who will be responsible for delivering the benefits element of the enhanced housing options service needs to be identified	Identify officer to provide 'better off' calculations	Head of Customer Operations	Officer ready to deliver 'better off' calculations Decrease in number of people claiming benefits	Officer identified by May 2009	Officer in post by July 2009	Staff time Internal funding in place £12,000 CLG funding	
A system for prioritising clients who may benefit from support needs to be developed	Agree prioritisation criteria and develop procedure	Information and Guidance Officer Job Centre Plus Manager Head of Housing Twin Valley Homes	Prioritisation criteria agreed Procedure in place People being referred for enhanced housing options interviews	Meetings to agree criteria and procedure taking place by April 2009	Criteria and procedure agreed by July 2009	Staff time Internal funding in place CLG funding for IAG officer as above	
We need to agree a target number of interventions	Set initial targets for interventions	Project Coordinator Information and Guidance Officer CLG Specialist Advisor Housing Needs Manager Head of Customer Operations	Initial target figure for interventions agreed	Initial targets set by July 2009	Final targets set by September 2009	Staff time Internal funding in place CLG funding for IAG officer as above CLG funding for project coordinator	
We need to develop a more sophisticated monitoring system to record outcomes	Develop monitoring system	As above	Monitoring system agreed	Contact with other trailblazer authorities and CLG made by April 2009	System agreed by July 2009	As above CLG funding for project coordinator	

THEME D: Improving access to information on care and repair services for older people

Current Service	Action	Who will Deliver	Target Outcomes	Milestones	End Date	Resources Needed	Progress
There is insufficient capacity to deliver the enhanced housing options service for older people	Create a time limited post of older person's enhanced housing options officer to better coordinate access to services	Head of Housing, Regeneration & Development	Officer in post Increase in number of older people able to remain in their homes or make a planned move	Officer identified by May 2009	Officer in post by July 2007	£30,000 CLG Funding per annum	

THEME E: Improving housing options for vulnerable young people

Current Service	Action	Who will Deliver	Target Outcomes	Milestones	End Date	Resources Needed	Progress
The complex need of young people are not being fully met due to the fragmentation of services	Set up a multi agency assessment and referral panel for young people in housing need	Housing Strategy Manager CXT Partnership Manager Children's Services Officer Housing Needs Officer	Panel set up Young people receiving holistic assessment of needs and appropriate referral	Staff team identified by July 2009 Terms of reference agreed by September 2009	Panel operational by September 2009	£245,000 Internal funding in place	Team manager and one officer appointed March 2009 'Passport to Housing' life skills training course being developed
There is no mediation service in place for young people facing homelessness due to being asked to leave the family home	Set up a mediation service	Housing Needs Manager Children's Services Manager	Mediation service in place Increase in homelessness prevention for young people	Funding agreed with Children's Services by July 2009	Service in place by September 2009	Staff time via young people's assessment and referral panel	

Current Service	Action	Who will Deliver	Target Outcomes	Milestones	End Date	Resources Needed	Progress
Homelessness prevention work is not being delivered in schools and colleges	Develop and deliver courses	Housing Needs Manager	Courses being delivered Reduction in youth homelessness	'Good practice' course and pilot schools / colleges identified by August 2009	Courses being delivered by October 2009	Staff time Internal funding in place	To be addressed by young people's assessment and referral project
Young parents do not at present receive a holistic service 70% of teenage parents are not in education, training or employment	Develop and deliver enhanced housing options service to young parents	Housing Strategy Manager Housing Needs Manager	Service in operation Increase in number of young parents in employment, training and education	Funding bid made by March 2009 Pilot project being delivered by May 2009	Project fully implemented by September 2009	£289,000 over 2 years Funding from Dept for Children, Schools and Families	Funding bid successful

Project management and monitoring

Current Service	Action	Who will Deliver	Target Outcomes	Milestones	End Date	Resources Needed	Progress
We need to ensure that the enhanced housing options service is coordinated and monitored	Appoint a project coordinator	Head of Housing and Strategic Enabling Services	Coordinator appointed Baselines and targets agreed Monitoring system agreed Regular updates being made and circulated to stakeholders and CLG Good practice being rolled out	Coordinator identified by March 2009 Other targets as per action plan	Coordinator in post until March 2011	£15,000 CLG funding	Coordinator appointed March 2009

Budget

Expenditure

	Year 1	Year 2
Information, Advice and Guidance Officer	£30,000	£31,000
Housing Advice CBL	£20,000	£21,000
Benefit Advice	£17,000	£18,000
Older People's Advice	£30,000	£31,000
Project Coordinator	£15,000	£16,000
Accredited Landlord Scheme	£30,000	£31,000
Accommodation, ICT, Printing and publicity costs etc	£5,000	£5,000
Young People's Project	£145,000	£100,000
Teenage Parent Project	£137,000	£142,000
Total Expenditure	£429,000	£395,000

Income

BwD BC funding

Housing Advice CBL	£10,000	£10,000
Accredited Landlord Scheme	£20,000	£20,000
Young People's Project	£145,000	£100,000

CLG grant funding

Information Advice and Guidance Officer	£30,000	£31,000
Housing Advice CBL	£10,000	£11,000
Benefit Advice	£17,000	£18,000
Older People's Advice	£30,000	£31,000
Project Coordinator	£15,000	£16,000
Accredited Landlord Scheme	£10,000	£11,000
Accommodation, ICT, Printing and publicity costs etc	£5,000	£5,000

DCFS grant funding

Teenage Parent Project	£137,000	£142,000
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Total Income	£429,000	£395,000
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Monitoring Framework

Thematic Targets	Quarterly Data									
	Target	Baseline	Q1 09/10	Q2 09/10	Q3 09/10	Q4 09/10	Q1 10/11	Q2 10/11	Q3 10/11	Q4 10/11
Developing options for people in private sector housing										
Number of landlords accredited	200	5								
Number of rent bonds issued	80	50								
Number of affordable private rented properties advertised through CBL	25	0								
Providing information, advice and guidance										
Number of initial assessments	250	0								
% of clients completing a written action plan	25%	0								
Number of enhanced housing options interviews with Housing Advice Service	65	0								
Number of 'better off' calculations made	65	0								
Number of clients moving into education	50	0								
Number of clients moving into training	50	0								
Number of clients moving into employment	25	0								
Improving access to information on care and repair services for older people										
Number of information packages delivered	30	0								
Number of referrals to appropriate agencies made	6	0								
Improving housing options for vulnerable young people										
Number of assessments by multi agency panel	200	0								
Number of young people moving into education	30	0								
Number of young people moving into training	60	0								
Number of young people moving into employment	10	0								
Number of young people remaining at home following mediation	5	0								
Number of homelessness prevention courses delivered in schools and colleges	8	0								
Improving housing options for young parents										
% of young parents offered an enhanced housing options interview	75%	0								
% of young parents moving into education	25%	20%								
% of young parents moving into training	15%	10%								
% of young parents moving into employment	5%	0								
Other key indicators										
Number of rough sleepers	0	0								
Number of families in temporary accommodation	4	4								
Number of families in B&B	0	0								
Number of young people in B&B	0	0								