

Housing Strategy

Redundant Garage Sites

The directorate's Local Authority New Build bid to the HCA to build the first council houses in the borough for over 20 years focussed on identifying former garage sites where anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping had resulted in eye sore sites and local resident and Member dissatisfaction. Five of these sites have been developed for council housing and are nearing completion. Work is on-going with Housing Association partners to identify other redundant garage sites which could be developed for affordable housing.

Supporting People – Housing related support

Housing related support is provided to vulnerable people to help them to achieve and/or maintain independent living in a home of their choice and prevent them from becoming homeless or admitted into institutional care (for example hospital, prison or residential care). This support is designed to help people to develop the skills that they need to run a home, stay safe, be healthy and participate in work, volunteering or social activities that make them feel part of their local community. The support that is provided is designed to specifically meet that person's individual needs.

£5.2 million will be spent during 2012/13 supporting around 3,000 vulnerable people at any one time. Of which 1,870 will be older people and the remainder are a mixture of people with learning disabilities, mental health issues, people who have experienced domestic abuse and others. Research demonstrates that the provision of suitable accommodation and support reduces the risk of offending or re-offending and this low level support enables people to live independently for longer by preventing crisis situations from occurring that are costly to remedy such as hospital admissions, declining health, the need to be admitted to long term residential care.

Support is generally for people who are regarded as having a vulnerability that may make them less able to live independently in their own home. This may include people from the following groups:

- People who misuse substances (drugs and/or alcohol)
- People who have experienced domestic abuse
- Gypsies and travellers
- People living with HIV
- People who are at risk of, or who are homeless
- People with learning disabilities
- People with mental health issues
- Offenders and ex-offenders
- Older People
- People with a physical and/or sensory disability
- Refugees
- Young parents
- Young People

The support is intended to help people to develop skills so that they can do things for themselves. This can include:

- Help in finding, setting up a home and continuing to successfully live there
- Help in managing finances

- Help to learn about and access other services
- Help to establish social contacts and activities
- Help to maintain personal safety, including safety in your home this can also include telecare/telemedicine equipment, adaptations, other equipment and reducing the risk of harm that you may cause to others or they may cause to you
- Help to access training, education, work and volunteering opportunities
- Help to develop a healthy lifestyle (exercise, cooking etc) and being able to access a GP and dentist (or other health services)

Whilst it could be argued that all of the services contribute to the Section 17 agenda, specifically schemes such as the housing related support services for offenders, young offenders and Staying Put (to help prevent repeat incidents of domestic abuse or hate crime) play a key role.

Alongside the investment in housing related support services recent capital investment in the Borough from the Homes and Communities Agency, West Mercia Housing Group and Churches Housing Association of Dudley and District has led to the development of a new domestic abuse refuge which will accommodate up to 14 households at any one time and support them to move on and break free from domestic abuse. This will become operational in Spring 2012.

Plans to redevelop Gibbs Road Hostel in Lye (owned and managed by Midland Heart to accommodate single homeless people) are also progressing. This involves plans to provide a new fit for purpose building containing 24 direct access accommodation units and 34 self-contained move-on flats. The final numbers of units to be provided within the new scheme are subject to negotiation with Midland Heart. The redevelopment also includes plans for on-site facilities for residents that will enable them to access training, education and prepare them for employment. This scheme reduces rough sleeping throughout the Borough.

Empty Homes (Private Sector)

Private Sector, DUE, Community Safety, DCP are working with the West Midlands Arson Task Force (Police and Fire Service) as part of the Void and Derelict Properties Group and have developed a mechanism of electronic notification of empty properties (residential and industrial and commercial) that are presenting a problem to the emergency services due to arson/crime incidents. The relevant Directorate is then responsible for investigation and notification to the Arson Task Force of action being taken. This has contributed to a reduction in the number of incidents of Arson across the region. This initiative has been incorporated into the empty homes work already underway and is funded through the existing capital budget.

Proactive and reactive work is done in this sector to encourage and enforce owners of empty properties to bring them back into use. Properties are prioritised against assessment criteria that ensures we are dealing with properties, the conditions of which have the greatest impact on local communities for a wide range of reasons.

A range of actions are taken from advice and guidance, through to enforcement and carrying works out in default with the end objective being to bring the property back into use.

The number of Private Sector empty homes brought back into use has annually increased from 61 in 2006/7 to 105 properties in 2010/11.

Noise Nuisance – Private Sector

There have been 1042 noise nuisance complaints received between April 2010 and March 2011 which have been dealt with in line with the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and are broken down as follows:

296 Noise from domestic Dogs

416 Noise from amplified music

285 Other domestic noise

28 Noise from domestic DIY

17 Noise from Alarms

Gypsies and Travellers

In the interests of continuing to improve community relations between the settled community and the residents of the Oak Lane Traveller Site, meetings are being re-established with the Police and other appropriate contacts to consider issues affecting Businesses and Residents surrounding Oak Lane site. The group will review existing working practices to promote the integration of the communities.

The role of the site warden has been developed to reinforce the importance of her role as the direct link between the council and the traveller community and the contribution this makes to fostering community cohesion. In addition to this the role of the Tenancy Development Officer is also being developed to promote links with health and education to ensure that the travellers have access to services.

Private Rented Sector Properties

The Council has powers and opportunities to regulate private sector landlords and to tackle disrepair and poor management in this sector. A Landlord Accreditation scheme is promoted to improve property management standards and has been running in Dudley for a number of years.

Where problems are identified either by complaints or through routine surveys the tenants and landlords will be contacted to arrange inspections and interviews. The Enforcement and Tenancy Support Teams in Private Sector Housing will be engaged where required to provide advice and guidance to landlords and tenants to ensure that the tenancy can be sustained and improved where needed.

Owner Occupied Properties

The Dudley Home Improvement Service offers advice and guidance to facilitate wherever possible the use of loan based, self funded or charitable financial solutions to secure the property's repair, improvement or adaptation to ensure that the occupier can continue to live at home independently. These works can range from small scale works of security to construction of large extensions.

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