

Executive Summary

A great deal has changed since the city council's last housing strategy was published in 2005: the housing market, political and financial environments, and sustainability standards for new and existing housing. For these reasons 2011 is the right time to adjust and update priorities for a four year period ending March 2015.

The context

- The greater Portsmouth economy, which is successful and resilient
- The age of Portsmouth's housing stock which is much older than many towns
- The city's housing market which is active and thriving when viewed over the long term
- Increasing recognition of the essential links between housing and the economy, health and educational opportunities.

There are five themes

Advice and accommodation

A portfolio of services will continue to be offered to all residents by the city council and several independent organisations acting in partnership. These include crisis assistance for homeless households; managing the housing waiting list for allocating social rented housing; the private rental Access Scheme; and a Tenancy Rights Service.

Housing-related support

This strategic plan illustrates several support programmes and services: Supporting People, Tenancy Support, Telecare communications, Homecheck home safety, sheltered housing for older people; and dwelling design for special needs as part of affordable housing development.

Creating more homes

Portsmouth must continue to provide new homes, both market and affordable, and this strategic plan's intentions are presented as three priorities:

Improving availability:

More housing is essential to meet growing demand and support the economy. Planning policy identifies several sites in Portsmouth on which new housing for families will be a priority.

Improving affordability:

Maximize development opportunities for homes that local residents can afford.

Improving quality:

The latest design and sustainability standards will continue to feature in housing scheme requirements.

Management principles

A framework is proposed to ensure estate management standards for affordable housing are achieved during an era of increasing change.

Portsmouth's housing stock

The strategic plan focuses on physical conditions for all dwellings, tenures and ages:

- Private housing: improving standards through grants and loans backed by a professional surveying service and, where necessary, applying legal powers to raise standards. Proactive promotion and working will continue to apply to the Landlord Accreditation Scheme and the Empty Property Campaign
- Affordable housing: summarising and illustrating ways in which social landlords will be improving their properties to meet energy conservation and generation objectives using new programmes such as Green Deal.

What We Wish To Achieve: Our Priorities

Housing priorities summarised in this third section are derived from social and economic evidence, published strategies, and a policy context in which the importance of housing is articulated by both the Portsmouth Local Strategic Partnership and the city council. The Local

Strategic Partnership confirms its long term priorities in Vision for Portsmouth 2008 to 2018 and the housing priority is to “Deliver affordable quality housing where people want to live”; this is interpreted and acted upon by the LSP’s Housing Partnership, a standing sub-group whose members represent several property interests in the city. The city council in its Corporate Plan for 2010-13 explains its housing priority is to “Increase the availability, affordability and quality of housing”. Behind these statements of priority objectives lies the need to plan for housing and housing related services for an increasingly diverse population, while attempting to balance resident’s competing requirements either individually or as groups.

The Green Agenda

The ‘green agenda’ must be closely allied to the provision and upkeep of housing, whether newly built or existing. Because of the significance of these ‘green’ issues they will be treated as integral elements to several themes, rather than being reported separately. Local priorities are influenced by national aspirations and one example is the Government’s UK Low Carbon Transition Plan. This aims to comprehensively improve the nation’s housing stock over the next 40 years so that by 2050 every home, new and existing, will have a zero carbon rating. The Code for Sustainable Homes is one of the tools to attain this national objective and the specific implications for Portsmouth are explained in Section Four

below. Similarly the Green Deal is a Government initiative involving power supply companies with new financial arrangements for funding energy efficiency measures through customer utility bills: national implementation will commence from 2012 but much in terms of policy and procedure has yet to be defined as at spring 2011. The city council’s Sustainability Strategy and the

Portsmouth Plan incorporate these aims and standards within principles that apply across all areas of activity including Portsmouth’s built environment.

Advice & Housing for Those in Greatest Need

Access to informed advice about housing rights and help in obtaining accommodation has been a priority for years in Portsmouth. A consequence of this commitment is that a network of advisory services has grown up which is available without charge to Portsmouth’s residents. Two are operated by the city council, the Housing Options Service and Tenancy Rights Service, while others are operated by independent organisations, one of the largest being the Portsmouth Advice Centre (PAC) which is jointly run by the You Trust and the Citizens Advice Bureau, with financial support from the city council. Requests for help received by these services are considerable: personal callers, for example, to the Housing Options Service exceed 10,000 annually. This is because, as outlined in Section Two, Portsmouth has high levels of demand for social renting, for which there is insufficient supply, which in turn increases reliance on the private rental sector. Whilst thousands need to rent a home, others need advice (often urgent) due to threatened homelessness and legal problems with their existing, usually private, tenancy.

A Helping Hand – Housing Related Support

The provision of appropriate housing with related support is an integral part of the commissioning and development of new properties, as well as for residents in their existing homes. Example will be found across all domestic situations and housing tenures in Portsmouth. Services provided are immensely varied and essential for the recipients, thereby enhancing their independence and quality of life. For these reasons alone, and despite the budgetary challenges expected to at least 2015, continuance of support services will be a priority. Other important reasons for prioritising expenditure include:

- Stabilising client’s health in their home minimises emergency hospital admissions

- Digital technologies are enabling new forms of support to be created
- The 'personalisation agenda' introduces an expanded element of customer choice
- Home-based support is more economic than hospital and other institutional care
- Flexibility of care is improved, such as extra-care facilities for frail older people
- For some needs a communal environment is necessary for intensive support.

Creating More Homes

City council policies create the context for housing development, a priority informed by research that includes resident opinion surveys. It is given shape by a planning regime that has the new Portsmouth Plan as the principal element of the Local Development Framework (LDF). As a result homes for sale by commercial developers have been encouraged and partnership arrangements with housing associations have been productive. The outcome has been 4,300 additional homes built or refurbished in various programmes such as the Empty Property Campaign over the six years to March 2011. Over one third are affordable with rents and sale prices set at below market levels. The city council has also created a housing development team that is focusing on sites held in the Housing Revenue Account and operated by the Housing Management service. In consequence new council housing is being planned for the first time in years, with over 40 homes on sites at Buckland and Somerstown in the development pipeline as of spring 2011.

In the present environment this momentum will be difficult to sustain. Prospects for the four years 2011-12 to 2014-15 are highly uncertain due to market conditions and reductions in public expenditure. However, about 1,900 new homes of all tenures, and meeting diverse housing needs, are projected to March 2015. Just over one third will be for rent for purchase at below market prices by housing associations and the city council. Some of the homes are expected to be developed on land released by the city council and other public agencies. Others will be part of mixed-use developments in the city centre or above existing retail premises across Portsmouth.

Nurturing the City's Stock of Housing

Newly constructed dwellings are rarely more than one percent of any built-up area and thus the standards defined by the Code for Sustainable Homes only affect a tiny proportion of Portsmouth's housing. The other 99 percent, effectively the entire housing stock, are existing properties whose increasing age has implications for the future. Hence the continuing priority given to programmes that improve the condition and quality of the city's housing whatever the tenure. This work has taken on a new urgency owing to the importance attached to better energy efficiency by the nation's housing, as set out in the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan referred to earlier.

Management Principles for Affordable Housing

As the Second Section above explains, the affordable housing sector is a very significant element of Portsmouth's housing market, with one in five dwellings and well over 30 not-for-profit housing providers. The city council is the largest social landlord, with around 15,000 properties in Portsmouth and neighbouring Havant. Other providers, although having a smaller presence in the city, are often national or regional organisations with substantial stock holdings totalling tens of thousands. Some local housing providers are long established charities with less than 50 dwellings. But the market for affordable housing is changing and new forms of housing provider are emerging who intend to develop affordable housing without public subsidy: the momentum for such change is expected to increase during the coming decade.

With the affordable housing market experiencing such rapid change there is a need to protect the interests of the individual householder by ensuring that estate management is of a high standard across Portsmouth.