

## **Consultation and Partnership Working Report Midlothian Local Housing Strategy 2013 – 2017**

### **Background**

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires all local authorities in Scotland to submit a Local Housing Strategy (LHS) which, describes the extent and type of housing need and demand, and sets out the local authority's strategic vision for the future of housing across all tenures, taking account of national priorities. Between April and June 2012 Consultative events and activities were held to provide stakeholders with opportunities to contribute their views on the information, outcomes and activities set out in the draft Local Housing Strategy. This report provides a detailed insight into partnership/stakeholders involvement, and consultative events that have gone into the producing the LHS. It also identifies the principal methods of engagement with stakeholders and partners.

### **1. Groups which Oversee or Influence the Housing Strategy**

There are many stakeholders which influence the development of the Local Housing Strategy. This section explains how they influence the strategic direction of the Local Housing Strategy. This is not an exhaustive list of all groups.

#### **The Local Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy Review Group**

This group meets on a quarterly basis to direct the work of the Local Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy. Attendees include Council Officers from a range of departments, including social work, planning, construction services, and environmental health. However, membership of this group also includes organisations who work in partnership with the Council to oversee the successful development, implementation and monitoring of the Local Housing Strategy. Organisations include: local Registered Social Landlords, Shelter, Changeworks (who provide advice and support to address fuel poverty and address climate change) and Aspire (who provide Housing Support Services).

Recent activity undertaken by this Group has included:

- Undertaking joint responses to Scottish Government consultation
- Reviewing other local authorities Consultative Draft Local Housing Strategies
- Considering the SESPlan Housing Need and Demand Report
- Discussion of ways to address the impact of welfare reform
- Facilitating a partnership bid for Scottish Government funding for an Empty Homes Project in Midlothian.
- Facilitating a partnership bid for Scottish Government funding for gas connection to Pathhead and the surrounding villages.

In addition to the Review Group being responsible for the monitoring and implementation of the Strategy, it has an important role in facilitating partnership to realise the outcomes of the Local Housing Strategy.

### **Midlothian Adult Health, Social Care and Housing Community Planning Partnership Group**

This Group meets on a quarterly basis to oversee the work of linked community planning groups, including the Local Housing Strategy and Homelessness Review Group. This Group receives a quarterly update on the progress on the implementation of the Local Housing Strategy Outcomes, as well as the activity of the other strategic groups including:

- Older People
- People with Dementia
- Mental Health
- Carers
- Learning Disability

An advantage of the Local Housing Strategy being represented in this grouping is that cross cutting issues can be addressed more effectively in partnership with other strategic groups within the Community Planning Partnership. For instance, the work of the strategic group on older people and people with dementia shows that increasing numbers of older people in Midlothian would have significant implications on the Local Housing Strategy in terms of the type of housing required and the requirement for housing which is more “dementia friendly”. In addition, since the implications of Welfare Reform are far reaching, this group provides a platform for relevant services and strategies to take account of the impact of welfare reform in the community.

### **Housing Association Forum**

All Housing Association’s are invited to engage with the Council via this quarterly forum to look at important strategic and operational issues affecting landlords, and consider where joint solutions can be developed. In addition to consultation on the Local Housing Strategy recent agenda items have included:

- Consultation on revised Allocation Policies
- Nomination Agreements
- Meeting the Homeless 2012 Target
- Identification of Additional Temporary Accommodation Opportunities

### **South East of Scotland Housing Market Partnership**

This group was primarily established to inform and direct the development of the South East of Scotland Housing Need and Demand Assessment through the development of a housing market partnership, which is a useful way of drawing together a wide range of partners to consider housing need and demand. This group consisted of a range of partners operating across local authority boundaries in order to consider cross boundary issues for the larger South East of Scotland housing market area which is needed to inform the SEPlan Housing Need and Demand Assessment and, as a result, Midlothian’s Local Housing Strategy.

Around 100 individuals/organisations took part in this group, including Local Authority Officers, Registered Social Landlords, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Private Sector House Builders, Letting Agents and Private Landlords and other organisations with interests in housing. Events were held to give people the opportunity to comment on research findings and members were encouraged to become active in an online forum, with discussion areas, and an information library. Organisations with an interest in Midlothian issues were given the opportunity to become stakeholders in the development of Midlothian's Local Housing Strategy.

### **Midlothian Financial Inclusion Network**

The network, which includes representatives from the Council, local Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Midlothian Advice & Resource Centre, Midlothian Voluntary Action and other organisations who have an interest in financial inclusion. MFIN's objectives: "To relieve poverty and to advance public education in all matters relating to the management of personal finances" fit well with some actions of the Local Housing Strategy. This Network is an important influence particularly in relation to the aspects of the Local Housing Strategy which relate to improving financial inclusion and alleviating poverty.

### **HECA Implementation Forum**

This Forum, hosted by Changeworks, assists Local Authority Officers in identifying appropriate actions aimed at reducing the number of households living in fuel poverty and improving the energy efficiency of housing. It enables good practice to be shared between local authorities and has been successful at generating joined up approaches to projects. For example, working with other local authorities enables a radio advertising campaign to be aired on radio stations across the south east of Scotland, something which could not be done if each local authority operated in isolation. The Forum also provided support to the Council in the bid for funding and implementation the Home Insulation and Universal Home Insulation Schemes.

### **Scottish Housing Best Value Network – Local Housing Strategy Practice Forum**

This network of Scottish local authorities and other housing providers is primarily focused on sharing good practice in order that Local Authority Officers can learn from others in setting strategic objectives and identifying suitable initiatives. In addition, the Local Housing Strategy will be evaluated by members of the Scottish Housing Best Value Network Group and the Scottish Government through a Peer Review Process to help evaluate the strategic objectives and suggest improvements which can be undertaken as part of annual reviews.

## 2. Local Housing Strategy Partnership Group Event

To ensure a wider representation and contribution, 170 stakeholder organisations within and outwith Midlothian with a potential interest in the Strategy were sent a copy of the Draft Strategy to comment on and also given the opportunity to attend the Local Housing Strategy Partnership Event. The types of organisations contacted included:

- Equalities Groups, including support groups, societies and campaigning organisations in areas including: race, equality, older people, carers, Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, older people's, ethnic minority groups, disabled, young peoples groups, armed forces veterans, substance abuse, physical disability and learning disability.
- Housing organisations, including registered social landlords, house builders, letting agents, landlord associations, relevant Scottish Government departments, and housing organisations groups such as Shelter and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations.
- Community Groups, including community councils, voluntary groups, Registered Tenants Organisations and residents groups.
- Other organisations, including neighbouring local authorities and the Scottish Futures Trust.

The following organisations and interests were represented at the event:

- Midlothian Council Social Work
- Midlothian Council Homelessness Section
- Midlothian Council Construction and Facilities
- Midlothian Council Repairs Section
- Midlothian Council Public Health Section
- Midlothian Council Community Safety
- Midlothian Council Regeneration
- Midlothian Council Planning Section
- West Lothian Council
- Energy Savings Trust
- People First
- Dalkeith Citizens Advice Bureau
- Melville Housing Association
- Castle Rock Housing Association
- NHS Lothian
- Ex. Vocal
- Margaret Blackwood
- CAPS - The Consultation & Advocacy Promotion Service
- Lasswade Civic Society

- Midlothian Financial Inclusion Network
- Places for People

The event started with Kevin Anderson, Head of Housing and Community Safety welcoming attendees, and pointing out that the essence of the event, was for Officers to listen to and be informed by the views of our stakeholders in order that the Local Housing Strategy takes account of local needs and priorities.

This was followed by a short quiz anchored by Lesley Connell, Housing Strategy and Performance Team. The quiz covered various teams in the Local Housing Strategy. The winning participant was given a prize.

Next was a presentation by Stephen Clark, Housing Strategy and Performance Manager who provided a background to the content and the aims of the Local Housing Strategy. He also outlined the proposed outcomes to be achieved by the Council's Local Housing Strategy.

### **Workshop Session Set-up**

Next on the agenda was a workshop session. There were two groups: group one and group two. Each group was further divided into two subgroups; 1A & 1B, and 2A & 2B. A facilitator and a scribe were provided for each subgroup.

Group 1 (1A and 1B): Groups were asked to examine the identified key issues and key activities detailed in the Local Housing Strategy for the following outcomes:

- Households have improved housing options across all tenures
- The condition of housing across all tenures is improved.

Group 2 (2A and 2B): Groups were asked to examine the identified key issues and key activities detailed in the Local Housing Strategy for the following outcomes:

- Homeless households and those threatened with homelessness are able to access advice and support services and all unintentionally homeless households are able to access settled accommodation.
- Households with particular needs are able to access appropriate accommodation and services.
- Housing in all tenures is more energy efficient with fewer households living in fuel poverty.

In addition, all subgroups were given the following questions to guide their discussions:

Question 1: Do you agree with the title of this outcome?

Question 2: Have the main issues and challenges been identified?

Question 3: Do you think the suggested activities are appropriate?

Question 4: Are there any other actions you would like to see included?

### **Outcomes from Workshop Discussion**

The points below were raised during workshop discussions and may not be reflective of views of everyone in each group, however, useful discussion took place during this event on a wide variety of issues which related to the Local Housing Strategy. Most groups felt they would have benefitted from further discussion suggesting an appetite for similar Local Housing Strategy Stakeholder groups during the implementation of the Local Housing Strategy.

#### **Group 1A- Facilitator: Stephen Clark; Scribe: Sean Faughey**

The group agreed with both outcomes that they were asked to consider.

#### **Main issues and challenges identified in relation to improving housing options:**

- Many people felt that the new welfare reform regulations will have a significant negative impact upon people's housing options.
- In effect, smaller households' housing options will be reduced if they are reliant on housing benefit.
- Smaller properties (in terms of bedroom size) will be required for new build developments.
- Few properties are of an appropriate size so there is a mismatch between housing stock and housing need – however this would not have been the case if it was not for welfare reform as most households aspire to having a house with space, and would have also allowed for flexibility e.g. growing families.
- It was considered whether 2 bed properties could be converted to 1 bed properties – this was unlikely to be acceptable to the Department for Work and Pensions.
- One member of the group felt that new build council and housing association properties were encouraging applications from people who could afford housing in the private market.
- There was a significant level of support for building housing with particular needs but it was recognised that some properties such as wheelchair houses are expensive to build. It was really important that properties in the private sector and public sector which have been adapted are being reused for people needed such properties. Better access to an adapted properties list would be useful.
- Affordable housing policies may not always be deliverable, perhaps a different approach required; a smaller requirement but with more deliverability might be more achievable.
- New mortgage indemnity scheme might boost new build sales.

### **Recommendations/Suggestions**

- Provide Mid Market Rented housing and Shared Equity housing.
- Local Authority could act as a lender for housing organisations at a time when financial options are restricted.
- Consideration of Town Centre Regeneration as part of the Local Housing Strategy.

### **Main issues and challenges in relation to improving the quality of housing across all tenures:**

- The move away from providing grants to owners will exacerbate problems of poor housing conditions in the private sector.
- The various 'green' schemes like universal home insulation have helped to improve the energy efficiency of housing.
- Most households were hesitant to use an equity release loan, but this was going to be one of the best options for low income households in order to avoid living in housing with urgent repairs. A particular issue where there are common repair obligations.
- It was felt that some of the poorest properties were in the private rented sector and it was hoped something could be done to assist improving standards.
- People were more confident that house conditions would improve in the social rented sector as it already had in recent years due to the requirements of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

### **Recommendations/Suggestions**

- Develop initiatives to help improve the condition of empty houses.
- Consider ways to incentivise or regulate private landlords to improve their own properties.
- Better signposting to appropriate tradespeople would be particularly beneficial for the elderly.

### **Group 1B- Facilitator: John McLeish; Scribe: Lesley Connell**

The group agreed on the title of outcomes.

### **Main issues and challenges identified:**

- Midlothian is similar to Fife in terms of many people in Midlothian commuting to Edinburgh daily.
- The present economic downturn poses a threat on the development of housing, however, it is expected that things will soon change.
- Current mortgage requirement of 20% deposit for first time buyers is a barrier to home ownership. This means that applying to the waiting list will continue to be the most feasible options for many people who are not able to afford mortgage deposit.

- The changes in the welfare system for those less than 35 years old impacts on their ability to afford rent if they cannot downsize or move into appropriate property size. This also places pressure on parents who may have to support them to pay their rents or to remain at home.
- Landlords are making a fortune from students in HMOs while local people cannot afford the rents of a larger flat.
- Mid Market Rent (MMR), Shared Equity – need to look at alternative tenures; make grant go further.
- Some considered MMR as not appropriate in rural areas but suitable for bypass boundary (area of greater demand for housing).
- Inability of people to access information on their housing options.

#### **Recommendations/Suggestions from the group**

- There is a need for more low cost housing to meet rising housing needs.
- One point of access needed; everything coordinated via this one point.
- Concentrate grant money on areas with highest needs - social housing.
- Council urged to publicise what's on offer in terms of housing options.
- Education, Education, Education!!! (Inform people of their options).
- Common Housing Register in Edinburgh – one form (possibility for Midlothian).

#### **Main issues and challenges identified: households with particular needs**

- Current housing stock not suitable for Midlothian's ageing population- remodelling and investment needed.

#### **Recommendations/Suggestions from the group**

- More single bedroom properties needed.
- Adaptations to ground floor properties to enable older people to remain at home.
- Adaptations should not be removed from properties – this saves money in terms of health spend.

#### **Main issues and challenges identified: LHS and Empty homes**

- The Local Housing Strategy is not understandable for some people.
- Empty homes - why are there empty homes?

#### **Recommendations/Suggestions from the group**

- Use Council Tax records to identify empty properties.
- Identify and invest in empty properties in order to bring them back into use.
- Consider Shelter programme, which, helps home owners to get their properties back into use. Labour intensive, but it is worthwhile.
- Idea to get an agency to help people get their homes back into use with the agreement for the agency but they get to keep % of the rent.
- Good idea to involve communities in trying to solve ASB.



- Need for a central contact point to provide advice and assistance to homeowners.
- Some members felt that there might be scope for a Housing Renewal Area in Midlothian, though it was not discussed what area could be designated.

### **Group 2A- Facilitator: Anthony Olowoyeye; Scribe: Liam McCallum**

Group agreed on the title of the outcome and suggested activities.

#### **Main issues and challenges identified**

- Perhaps the Local Housing Strategy could do more to address housing needs of people with mental health.
- Accommodation provided for people with mental health mostly not suitable.
- Concerns about families with children in unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Some felt that there was more that could be done in terms of furniture and furnishing for young homeless persons being allocated housing. This can improve their ability to sustain their tenancies.
- Concerns for working young persons who cannot afford home ownership or private rent. This places pressure on their parents.
- Some felt that information on housing could be made more accessible.
- Correspondence from the housing department to tenants, especially those with lower literacy level, is not always easy to understand.
- Increase in single households among those over 65 year olds due to death or long term health problems of partners, thereby leading to under occupancy.
- People with mental health issues, homeless young persons, etc lack the skills to communicate with their energy suppliers. This makes them go into debt.

#### **Recommendations/Suggestions from the group**

- Comprehensive assessment of needs to ensure tenancy sustainment
  - Consider providing more furniture & furnishing for homeless young persons and those with mental health issues to help sustain their tenancies.
  - Housing Officers should also provide support for people with mental health issues and homeless young persons to enable them sustain their tenancies.
- Better awareness and communication to ensure needs are met appropriately.
- Ensure housing provided is safe and secure. This is essential for tenancy sustainment.
- Better partnership and services with stakeholders (NHS, Council, local churches).
- Greater details should be paid to income maximisation - it is not just about benefit check.
- Council should assist tenants to build skills required to maintain/sustain their tenancies.
- More regular and ongoing contact with tenants needing support should be put in

place in order to ensure tenancy sustainment

- Council urged to tap into the Green Deal and the Energy Company Obligation in order to appropriate a fair share of the benefits.
- Increase the energy efficiency in private rented sector.
- Support young people with aspirations to own their own homes or tenancies through housing options.
- Need to connect more with the housing, homelessness and training needs of people to provide support to enable them sustain their tenancies.
- Coaching needed to enable people move forward in life.
- Suggestion on the conversion of useable green areas or flower gardens into vegetable gardens. This would result in a community benefit

### **Group 2B- Facilitator: Alex Marks; Scribe: Tracy Hill**

#### **Main issues and challenges identified: homelessness**

- Community involvement is paramount.
- Outcome should mention prevention, early intervention and mediation.
- The LHS should make more reference to the Armed Forces.
- Some people felt that some outcomes identified in the LHS are not achievable primarily due to welfare reform and high levels of homelessness presentations.
- A respondent from CAB expressed concern about their ability to cope with additional workload in terms of welfare reform and homelessness.
- MFIN: statement in Strategy should be amended in terms of how the housing department can work with MFIN partners.

#### **Recommendations/Suggestions from the group**

- Need to have an understanding of the impact of homelessness on the individual/family.
- Welfare reform changes: Council needs to prepare for the Welfare Reform now.
- Culture change – need to change the culture where people view homelessness as a short cut to being allocated council housing. It was felt that some people tend to deliberately make other family members homeless in order for such family members to be given housing priority by the Council.
- Use of school education programme as a homelessness prevention tool.
- Lothians & Edinburgh Abstinence Programme (LEAP) linked to housing in Edinburgh but needs better linkages in Midlothian.
- Housing and other Council support activities should work closely with Mid & East Lothian Drugs (MELD).
- Need for evidence of organisational linkages in the Local Housing Strategy.
- Issues of violence against women should be more explicit in the Strategy, including their housing needs.

- It was suggested for the Council to expand tenure options in Midlothian.
- Consider other housing options including Mid Market Rent and Low Cost Ownership.
- There is a need for a clear definition of settled accommodation in Scotland.
- Council should look at more varieties of temporary accommodation e.g. supported lodgings.
- Group agreed that the Council needs to look at the key drivers of housing in Midlothian in order to help tenants sustain their tenancies:
  - Financial
  - Social isolation
  - Emotional
- Increase types of supported accommodation for young people.
- Innovation needed to prevent young people being locked into traditional types of care.
- Skills exchange both in and outside the area: variety of options to help support varying issues and behaviour.
- Care leavers who are looked after at home: this group is missing out in support, and there is the need to provide more support and assistance to them.
- There is a need to focus on homelessness prevention through community capacity building.
- Council should get families involved in taking responsibilities for homeless family members and those needing support.
- Carryout a review of hostels and create pathway out of hostels.

#### **Main issues and challenges identified: households with particular needs**

- Not enough priority given to housing needs of those with particular need.

#### **Recommendations/Suggestions from the group**

- People need to maintain what households they have – adapt existing accommodation to needs.
- Good buildings need to be adapted to people's needs, and existing ones need to be fit for purpose.
- Need for buildings that are future proof, along with up skilling the workforce to help those with particular needs housing sustain their tenancies.
- Our current new build housing should be built to housing for varying needs standards, while also creating a mixed community.
- Develop prevention working with partners and across the Council.
- Put support in place to help keep people at home.
- Implementing the LHS creates an opportunity to put into action what we are all talking about.
- Housing department urged to work closely with regeneration: look at existing communities and develop mixed tenures.
- Provide support to help households with particular needs sustain their tenancies.

- Consider the use of co-production and capacity building as models of good practice e.g. Hopefield, Bonnyrigg.
- Identify new build plan for the future.
- Help lift households out of fuel poverty.
- Change and use our existing stock more creatively, e.g. through the use of empty homes.
- Develop better ways of matching people's needs to suitable property.

## Stakeholder Priorities

It was explained to stakeholders that receiving input into what people felt were the priorities of the Local Housing Strategy would help to agree the priorities for implementing the Strategy. To help stakeholders make decisions, each participant was given coloured stickers which they could stick on posters to highlight activities and outcomes which were important to them. Each participant was given two green stickers to stick to the outcome or outcomes that they viewed as being most important. They were also given 5 blue stickers to highlight specific key actions that they felt should be top priorities for the Strategy.

## Photographs: Showing Prioritisation Exercise



## Outcomes

The table below indicated that two outcomes considered by the group to be the most important were: “Households have improved housing options across all tenures” – which relates to activities which help to increase the number of homes in Midlothian, including the development of affordable housing and access to housing. The other most picked was “Housing in all tenures is more energy efficient with fewer households living in fuel poverty.” Both of these outcomes were marked as a priority 17 times by participants. The

remaining three outcomes were also accorded a fairly equal amount of importance, two were marked 9 times and one was marked 8 times.

However, it is also important to consider those key actions which have been marked as a priority as part of this exercise. It was evident that the homelessness outcome had the highest number of actions marked as a priority (marked 36 times), reflecting that some participants felt some specific key actions were of particular importance to the success of the Local Housing Strategy. In addition, a high number of key actions were marked as a priority for the improving housing options outcome, having been marked 30 times, followed by the households with particular needs outcome, which was marked 29 times.

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>No. Marking as a Priority</b>	<b>No. Marking a related Key Action as a Priority</b>
Households have improved housing options across all tenures	17	30
Homeless households and those threatened with homelessness are able to access advice and support services and all unintentionally homeless households are able to access settled accommodation	9	36
The condition of housing across all tenures is improved	9	24
Households with particular needs are able to access appropriate accommodation and services	8	29
Housing in all tenures is more energy efficient with fewer households living in fuel poverty	17	24

### Key Actions

The most important key actions according to the stakeholder group were:

- Ensure households at risk of welfare reform are informed of changes that will affect them and offer solutions, such as use of incentive to move and downsizing schemes (Marked 9 times).
- Reduce the number of homeless presentations by 20% through early intervention, homeless prevention activity and by providing housing options (Marked 8 times).
- The Council, together with its partners will develop an increased proportion of housing stock that meets the needs of households with physical and complex disabilities (Marked 8 times).
- Continue to work with Changeworks and other partners to ensure that fuel poor households or households at risk of fuel poverty are able to access advice and

assistance to help them reduce the proportion of income they spend on fuel bills (Marked 8 times).

- Work with partners, including Shelter Scotland's Empty Homes Service to develop initiatives to get long term empty homes back into use (Marked 8 times).
- Build smaller housing to address the growing number of single person households and to avoid households under-occupying larger homes in the social rented sector (Marked 7 times).
- Ensure households in all tenures can access appropriate aids, adaptations and telecare support to enable them to live independently (Marked 7 times).

It is interesting to note that all outcome areas had at least one key activity highlighted as a priority, suggesting that most participants agreed that there was a broad range of activity that was important to prioritise.

#### Are there other Key Actions that the Local Housing Strategy should undertake?

Participants were also given the opportunity to post their own ideas about key actions that the Local Housing Strategy should undertake during 2013 – 2017. These have been split into their respective outcome area below.

<b>Households have improved housing options across all tenures</b>
<p>"Change to one system only process for applying for social housing – instead of numerous individual housing providers."</p> <p>"More buildings which are future proofed so people can easily adapt them as their needs change."</p> <p>"Building design and new area design that facilitates communities to develop e.g. facilitating communication with neighbours."</p>
<b>Homeless households and those threatened with homelessness are able to access advice and support services and all unintentionally homeless households are able to access settled accommodation</b>
<p>"More focus on prevention and community/families developing their own solutions to homelessness."</p> <p>"Review hostels and improve hostel pathways."</p> <p>"Temporary accommodation models should include more creative models e.g. approved landlady schemes through Barnardos."</p> <p>"Housing allocation should not just be about 'a roof' but a package of support to sustain tenancies e.g. social and emotional needs."</p> <p>"To ensure housing options and support are aligned to drug and alcohol rehab programmes."</p> <p>"More focus on addressing the culture of 'getting a council house' when you fall out with your family."</p>

<p><b>The condition of housing across all tenures is improved</b></p> <p>“Improve the quality of housing in the private rented sector.”</p> <p>“Council support to owners of empty houses to improve, let and share proceeds of rent.”</p> <p>“We need to start future proofing our existing stock for an ageing population with investment in remodelling and adaptations.”</p>
<p><b>Households with particular needs are able to access appropriate accommodation and services</b></p> <p>“Recognise that small environmental changes to property can maintain people to stay effectively in their existing tenancy/home for much longer – create a Dementia Environment Advisory Service.”</p> <p>“A move towards more people with learning difficulties being supported in their own tenancies.”</p>
<p><b>Housing in all tenures is more energy efficient with fewer households living in fuel poverty</b></p> <p>“Provide adequate support for households to develop life skills to maintain their home and prevent homelessness and fuel poverty.”</p> <p>“Innovation required via partners and stop the focus on buildings being the solution – should be on people and communities.”</p> <p>“Preventative agenda - empowering communities via coproduction and reduce dependency and reliance on the Council.”</p>



### 3. Consultation with Tenants and Residents

Midlothian Council residents have been involved in the process of developing the new Local Housing Strategy in the following ways:

#### Midlothian News and Midlothian Council Website

Midlothian Council publishes “Midlothian News”, a monthly community newspaper which is sent to 40,000 households in the county and also displayed in schools, community centres and libraries. Awareness of the Local Housing Strategy was raised via a prominent news article in the June 2012 edition which encouraged people to read the Draft Strategy, attend the drop in event and provide their feedback. The Council’s website has also been useful in promoting the Local Housing Strategy during its three month consultation period during the summer of 2012, with the Strategy being one of the front page “banners” during this time.

**Picture: Front Cover of Midlothian News, June 2012**



#### Register of Interested Tenants and Register of Interested Prospective Tenants

A significant proportion of tenants (1,453) and waiting list applicants (750) are registered with the Council for receiving more information about housing related issues. All those who had registered received a letter telling them about the Local Housing Strategy and were sent a Summary version of the Strategy. They were also invited to the Drop in Session and made aware of other methods of providing feedback (telephone, online survey, writing a letter, telephone comments, email).



### Presentations at the Annual Tenants Day

In the last three years at the annual tenants day for Midlothian Council tenants the Council's Housing Strategy Section has undertaken a presentation highlighting some of the key achievements of the Local Housing Strategy. In addition, in 2011 and 2012 the audience were told about the ongoing development of the new Local Housing Strategy and how tenants could be involved with the development of the Strategy. This was followed by a question and answer session, with copies of the draft Local Housing Strategy being made available to all attendees.

### Consultation Events with Registered Tenants Organisations

Housing staff met with the two Registered Tenants Organisations in Midlothian at their Committee Meetings to discuss their views on what the priorities should be for the Local Housing Strategy. To help groups make decisions, each attendee was given coloured stickers which they could stick on posters to highlight activities and outcomes which were important to them. Each participant was given 2 green stickers to stick to the outcome or outcomes that they viewed as being most important. They were also given 5 blue stickers to highlight specific key actions that they felt should be top priorities for the Strategy.

### Outcomes from Consultation with the Tenants and Prospective Tenants Action Group (TAPTAG)

The table below indicates that the outcome considered by the group to be the most important was "Households with particular needs are able to access appropriate accommodation and services" with 5 priority points. This was followed by "Homeless households and those threatened with homelessness are able to access advice and support services and all unintentionally homeless households are able to access settled accommodation" with 4 priority points. The third ranked outcome was "The condition of housing across all tenures is improved".

"Households have improved housing options across all tenures" and "Housing in all tenures is more energy efficient with fewer households living in fuel poverty" have the lowest priority points with 1 and no points respectively. However, this is contrary to the results from the Stakeholders' events where both outcomes were considered to be the highest priorities.

On the other hand, the outcome with the highest rated individual actions was "Households have improved housing options across all tenures" - marked 17 times. This was against the priority score of 1 received by this outcome. In addition actions under the outcome "the condition of housing across all tenures is improved" and "housing in all tenures is more energy efficient with fewer households living in fuel poverty" each received a priority rating of 8.

<b>TAPTAG Priorities</b>		
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>No. Marking as a Priority</b>	<b>No. Marking a related Key Action as a Priority</b>
Households with particular needs are able to access appropriate accommodation and services	5	7
Homeless households and those threatened with homelessness are able to access advice and support services and all unintentionally homeless households are able to access settled accommodation	4	7
The condition of housing across all tenures is improved	3	8
Households have improved housing options across all tenures	1	17
Housing in all tenures is more energy efficient with fewer households living in fuel poverty	0	8

The most important key actions according to the TAPTAG group were:

- Build smaller housing to address the growing number of single person households and to avoid households under-occupying larger homes in the social rented sector (marked 6 times).
- Development of a second phase of affordable housing to build up to 1,500 new council homes by 2017 (marked 6 times).
- Reduce the amount of time spent in temporary accommodation (marked 3 times).
- Bid for funding to improve the energy efficiency of housing (marked 3 times).

In addition, the following actions were each marked 2 times:

- Continue to work with Changeworks and other partners to ensure that fuel poor households or households at risk of fuel poverty are able to access advice and assistance to help them reduce the proportion of income they spend on fuel bills.
- All new build housing in Midlothian should be built with recognition of particular needs in order that there is a reduced incidence of households being unable to carry on living in their own home, and a reduced requirement for expensive home adaptations.
- Ensure that all social rented property in Midlothian meets the SHQS by 2015

- Work with partners, including Shelter Scotland's Empty Homes Service to develop initiatives to get long term empty homes back into use.
- Improve the quality of housing and management and maintenance standards by ensuring all Private Landlords are registered with the Council and promote Landlord Accreditation.
- Reduce the number of breaches of unsuitable temporary accommodation.
- Secure land and resources for affordable housing through Midlothian Council's Affordable Housing Policy

#### Are there other Key Actions that the Local Housing Strategy should Undertake?

Attendees were also given the opportunity to post their own ideas about key actions that the Local Housing Strategy should undertake during 2013 – 2017. These have been split into their respective outcome area below.

<b>Households have improved housing options across all tenures</b>
<p>"Appropriate 'filters' required to prevent abuse and misuse of application for properties"</p> <p>"Giving new housing stock to homeless people and stop moving tenants already in a home that is big enough"</p>

<b>Homeless households and those threatened with homelessness are able to access advice and support services and all unintentionally homeless households are able to access settled accommodation</b>
<p>"Making sure bedroom sizes are adequate for the purpose"</p>

<b>The condition of housing across all tenures is improved</b>
<p>"Private landlords should be more intensely vetted- their property inspected before they are allowed to let"</p> <p>"Checks on tenants that are given new properties 1-3years"</p> <p>"More insulation with new builds"</p> <p>"Encourage properties to have gardens to ensure welfare + promote healthy lifestyles".</p>

#### Outcomes from Consultation with the Midlothian Tenants Federation (MTF)

The table below indicates the outcomes and actions considered to be of most importance by the group. It shows that the group marked actions under each outcome equally, which suggests that participants felt it was important to give an equal weighting to activities in each outcome.

Outcome	No. of Markings for actions in each outcome as a Priority
Homeless households and those threatened with homelessness are able to access advice and support services and all unintentionally homeless households are able to access settled accommodation	8
Housing in all tenures is more energy efficient with fewer households living in fuel poverty	8
The condition of housing across all tenures is improved	8
Households have improved housing options across all tenures	8
Households with particular needs are able to access appropriate accommodation and services	8

### Key Actions

The Table below shows that, in terms of the most important actions, MTF was keen for priority to be given to tenants and residents to enable them participate in housing services and for households requiring housing support, with both actions marked 4 times. Actions relating to fuel poverty and energy efficiency were also considered a priority. In terms of further comments and ideas, the main points related to the following action:

<b>Households have improved housing options across all tenures</b>
<p>Members of MTF noted that, while it has led to significant rental increases for existing tenants, there was support for the Council's new house building plans. However, it was felt that the Right to Buy had caused the current housing shortage and the lost houses would not be replenished sufficiently by the new building.</p> <p>It was also felt that the average cost of a private rent was not affordable for many local people and this was creating additional demand for council housing.</p> <p>There was also concern that housing allocation policies were being determined by the Scottish legislation, as members disagreed with this and felt that the Council, directed by Tenants should have greater control over the allocation policies to ensure that it meets local needs.</p>

<b>MTF Actions Selected as a Priority</b>	<b>No. of times marked</b>
Ensure all households who require housing support are able to access appropriate services promptly	4
Support the involvement of tenants and residents in housing services in Midlothian	4
Continue to work with Changeworks and other partners to ensure that fuel poor households or households at risk of fuel poverty are able to access advice and assistance to help them reduce the proportion of income they spend on fuel bills	3
Continue to pursue opportunities for lowering household fuel costs in areas which are off gas grid	3
Continue to monitor the condition of housing in order that disrepair in the housing stock is addressed and where appropriate designate a Housing Renewal Area.	3
Secure land and resources for affordable housing through Midlothian Council's Affordable Housing Policy	3
Develop Extra Care Housing for elderly people and agree an allocation policy for this type of housing	3
Ensure households in all tenures can access appropriate aids, adaptations and telecare support to enable them to live independently	3
Maintain a high level of tenancy sustainment in social rented housing	2
Work with Community Planning Partners and MFIN to assist households in fuel poverty	2
Improve the quality of housing management and maintenance standards by ensuring all private landlords are registered with the Council and promote landlord Accreditation	2
Implement an Estate management Strategy to ensure that neighbourhoods are in good condition and Anti Social Behaviour is effectively tackled	2

#### Local Housing Strategy Drop in Event

Tenants and residents were invited to attend an informal on Drop in Event, where they could discuss their views with members of the Housing Team, read additional information materials and work on project prioritisation via the use of sticky notes, similar to what was used at the Stakeholder meeting. The project prioritisation boards were also very useful in aiding discussion. The Drop in Session was held in the offices of Midlothian Voluntary Action, which is an accessible and central location within Dalkeith town centre, with housing staff present all afternoon to talk to members of the public and answer questions. Issues raised by participants are summarised as follows:

<b>Private Housing</b>
<p>Two members of the public who were Council Tenants both raised concerns about private housing issues in relation to estate management.</p> <p>It was felt there was not much to compel the private owner to ensure they take responsibility for their property and gardens.</p> <p>One tenant expressed her frustration with her neighbour who is a private owner and who does nothing to maintain her garden, causing a jungle of weeds which grows into the tenants own garden and is an unsightly mess.</p> <p>Another participant mentioned that part of his neighbours property looked ready to collapse and was a danger to the occupants and those in adjacent buildings.</p> <p>As a result they felt that not just advice and assistance to owners, but also enforcement of private owners to maintain their property should be treated as a priority.</p>

<b>Housing Need</b>
<p>Several participants felt that the current approach to allocating social housing was completely wrong. Despite noting that there are specific legislative requirements placed on social landlords, one person explained that she felt it was discriminatory. She cited the case of her son, who rents a private room for £300 per month which is inadequate for him or for his daughter to stay with him. He has been in employment for some time but she feels that houses go to people who make themselves homeless and are not in employment, whilst he seems to have little hope of ever getting a new house.</p> <p>Concerns regarding fraudulent or immoral behaviour were also expressed, such as people buying their grandparents' Council house just to make a profit and single mothers claiming to be homeless households and then having their (undeclared) partner moving in.</p> <p>Support was expressed for the complete abolition of the Right to Buy, however, it was felt house sales had gone unchecked for so long that the damage had been done and that the Council were unlikely to be in a position to build enough houses to go anywhere near replacing the stock that had been sold off and meeting existing housing need.</p>

<b>House Size for Future Affordable Housing</b>
<p>One participant felt that while some 1 bed properties should be built in response to demographic changes and the impact of welfare reform, 2 bed properties should still form the majority as this house type provides greater flexibility to facilitate family changes, or if an elderly person requires a carer to stay over. However, another participant was very supportive of building smaller homes, noting:</p> <p>"1 bed housing would be fantastic for my son - that is all he needs."</p>

Another participant was eager to see 1 bed houses, not flats built as she needed to downsize to avoid having her housing benefit reduced, but was hesitant to move to a flat due to concerns about her neighbours. She was also keen to get more information from the Council in relation to Welfare Reform and how she will be affected.

### **Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency**

One participant noted support for energy saving measures in homes, noting he had lived in a part of Bonnyrigg which was served by a district heating scheme:

“Being a part of a community heating scheme means my bills are cheaper - they are a good thing as long as they are reliable.”

One resident felt that homes should be checked up on to spot problems, such as looking for draughts etc.

### Private Landlords Newsletter and Survey

In order to engage with specific issues in the Local Housing Strategy that relate to the private rented sector, private landlords were informed about the ongoing development of the Local Housing Strategy via the Private Landlord Newsletter – a publication that is sent to all private landlords who are registered with Midlothian Council to let property. Landlords were encouraged to complete an online survey on [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) or contact the Housing Strategy Team for more information. A few calls were noted and one landlord filled in the survey, who noted that the condition of property and the reputability of their tenants were their most important issues as a landlord.

### Consultation with Particular Needs Groups

As noted earlier, a significant number of organisations were consulted with during the development of the Local Housing Strategy. One issue that was noted at the early stage of the consultation process was that several members of the public, particularly those unfamiliar with housing phrases, found the Local Housing Strategy document difficult to comprehend, and also found it too long.

To address this potential problem, a Summary document had been produced which provided the main points (the Summary document was 13 pages long, compared 83 to pages for the Main document). However, to further address concerns during the consultation period, an “Easy Read” version was produced which was designed to help explain concepts in an easier way using visual aids and is particularly suitable for people with literacy problems or a learning disability. No requests for other formats, such as Braille, talking book or alternative languages were made during the process.

However, such requests will be accommodated if required during the lifetime of the Strategy. The consultation period also prompted a meeting with Midlothian Disability Access Panel to discuss housing issues with disabled service users. The housing needs of travelling showpeople were not considered to be an issue of particular relevance for the

Midlothian community, and issues relating to these households were also not raised during the consultation period. Further information on equality groups can be viewed in the Midlothian Local Housing Strategy Equality Impact Assessment.

### Formal Feedback

A total of 23 formal responses were received during the consultation. The feedback is summarised in an Appendix, which shows what action has been taken in light of the responses. 11 respondents provided feedback via [www.surveymonkey](http://www.surveymonkey.com), with other users corresponding either by email or through a written letter.

### Surveys which Inform Strategy Development

A significant number of additional areas of consultation have also had a direct influence on the development of the Local Housing Strategy, or are important in informing targets in the Action Plan. Such areas of consultation include:

- Tenant Satisfaction Surveys in 2009 and 2012.
- Customer Satisfaction Measuring Tools in service specific areas, including Allocations, Homelessness, Temporary Accommodation and Community Safety.
- Engagement with Gypsy Travellers through meetings regarding improvements on the Local Authority Site and the Site Residents Newsletter. Other Consultation Activities which have informed the development of the Local Housing Strategy.
- Survey of Waiting List Applicants on their views of the priorities of the Council's Second Phase of the New Build Social Housing Programme.
- Survey of tenants living in new build council housing.
- Rent Consultation with Council tenants and potential tenants in relation to the improvement and investment programme.



#### 4. How has the consultation period influenced the Local Housing Strategy?

The consultation surrounding the Local Housing Strategy has not only helped to shape the Strategy, it has also raised the profile of the Local Housing Strategy as an important prominent strategic document. It is notable that whilst there has been a broad range of views from the respondents and from the event participants, there is a great deal of consensus about what the Local Housing Strategy should achieve by 2017.

Some of the key points that have emerged during the consultation period included:

- **Outcomes of the Local Housing Strategy:** The majority of those consulted with agreed with the outcomes of the Local Housing Strategy, with only a few minor wording changes being suggested.
- **Housing options and homelessness actions:** Improving housing options and homelessness actions were generally accorded the highest priority by those consulted with.
- **Homelessness prevention:** A significant area of interest surrounded homelessness prevention activity, including tenancy sustainment, housing support, enacting cultural change and financial inclusion.
- **Welfare reform:** Welfare reform is an area of concern not only to housing practitioners, but to other organisations and many Midlothian residents also. It was also recognised that many of the ambitions of the Strategy have had to be revised in light of the likely effects of the reforms, such as the ability of single homeless households to access social housing of the appropriate size, which is likely to generate an ongoing need for temporary accommodation.
- **Housing supply target:** The housing supply target was reduced to make it a more realistically achievable level whilst still being ambitious and reflecting the need for housing in Midlothian.
- **Coproduction:** Some LHS activities are well suited to being developed with service users as part of a coproduction exercise.
- **Empty homes:** A target of reducing the number of empty homes by 10% has been added.
- **Partnership Involvement:** It was generally recognised that a wide range of partners had a role in the development and implementation of the Local Housing Strategy and not just Midlothian Council.
- **Ongoing LHS briefing and feedback:** There was interest in being kept informed of the progress of the development of the Strategy and how the feedback would be used to inform the ongoing development of the Strategy.