

Conference Report

The response to our conference by all agencies from across the city, and wider, has been very encouraging. 124 people representing 55 partner agencies across the public, private and voluntary sector attended and contributed. This has given our plans to develop a new housing strategy for the city a flying start.

We are very grateful to our speakers, Jake Berry MP, Richard Capie from the Chartered Institute of Housing, and Colin Molton for the Homes and Communities Agency who stimulated and challenged our thinking. Thanks should also go to our chair for the day Richard Kitson OBE.

Feedback on the conference has been universally positive and we are very grateful to the 70 delegates who stayed with us throughout the day and engaged in constructive debate in the theme groups in the afternoon.

Workshop Feedback

This paper includes a short report from each of the conference workshops:

- Growing the City
- Better Homes : Healthy Lives
- Housing Choice : Smarter Solutions
- Successful Communities

We have captured the essence of each group's response to the papers we sent out prior to the conference, and these have now, with your help, been refined / clarified etc. This work now continues with the Task and Finish Groups.

Next Steps

The multi agency task and finish groups which some delegates have agreed to join will now take the outcomes from the conference and over the next two months turn this into draft:

- Strategic objectives – as the core of the housing strategy
- Definitions of what outcomes we expect if we achieve the objectives
- Outline priority actions to deliver the objectives
- Ideas on resourcing the actions – to ensure they are deliverable – if aspirational
- An overview of key risks

Do not be concerned if you are not directly contributing to these groups, as their outcome will be a consultation paper to be widely circulated in April/May for your engagement and ideas.

After your responses we will distil this to form the core of the city's new housing strategy which will be drafted and developed for full consultation in late summer/early autumn.

Process

This may seem like a protracted process – but it is clear that strategies developed in isolation from the wide range of people and professions who deliver them on the ground are invariably unsuccessful in delivering their objectives. We need this strategy to be widely supported to ensure it will deliver for the city.

Thank you for your continued support in working towards better housing outcomes for the people of Plymouth.

Stuart Palmer
Assistant Director, Strategic Housing
Plymouth City Council

Context:

Participants in the workshop agreed that the context of this theme was accurately reflected in the 'Options and Choices' paper issued during the conference.

Challenges:

The challenges already identified in the 'Options and Choices' paper were agreed and endorsed, with the following comments and additional challenges raised:

Housing Numbers and Demand

- **Setting a Target for the delivery of 200 units a year** – need to ensure any target is deliverable rather than aspirational, and how will the Housing Strategy support the delivery of an adequate housing supply across all tenures.
- **Severe shortage of affordable housing** – shortfall in meeting housing needs accepted but also need to focus on increasing the range of our housing offer; increased focus on intermediate housing to help those on low to middle incomes. Also need to consider future demand and impact of student accommodation.
- **Inertia in the delivery of new housing** – current funded development pipeline falls away in 2012, what will the new regime deliver. Maintaining development momentum in the city is key.
- **Need to achieve an appropriate balance** - maximising affordable housing delivery with maintaining quality and standards, and creating places where people want to live.
- **Development viability** – an increasing challenge for housing delivery and also the need to fund infrastructure. Need to align infrastructure requirements and funding within Local Investment Plan and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Affordability

- **Access to mortgages** – access to credit for development finance as well as for individual purchasers
- **Economic development and prosperity** – support to increase jobs and earnings across the city.
- **Responding to the new Affordable Rent model** – how to maintain affordability which meets housing needs as well as increases new affordable supply.

Future Delivery

- **Compete nationally** – need for all partners to promote the City more effectively to generate confidence and subsequently aid growth in jobs, investment, housing and population.
- **How housing delivery can best contribute to the economic growth of the city** – with a move away from relying on public sector funding.
- **Maximising other investment** – explore new sources of development funding, making the new Affordable Rent model work for Plymouth, how to attract institutional funding.

- **Local Investment Priorities** – the need to maintain flexibility between development in our spatial priority areas and ‘strategic opportunism’ of good value delivery elsewhere in the city.

Options:

Workshop participants were asked to consider how the challenges raised and debated might be overcome, and reviewed all of the options proposed in the issues and options papers and additional ones raised at the conference. The following objectives and actions have been taken from the themes that came out of the resulting discussion, starting with those that received most support.

- **Secure new jobs for the city**- there was widespread support for the idea that the city should first concentrate on attracting new large scale skilled employment that would replace the historic reliance on the MOD. This was felt to be a pre-requisite for a housing market recovery in the city and an improved housing offer in the city was needed. It was suggested by some that incentives should be offered to business to help Plymouth compete with other parts of the UK.
- **Promote the city**- linked to the above, it was proposed that Plymouth should market itself more positively again for employers as well as new residents, by showcasing its positive qualities more effectively and creating the sense that it is ‘open for business’. Generate confidence that will aid growth. It was also suggested that tourism led regeneration such as hosting large events in the city would help boost the profile of the city and provide employment.
- **Understanding and improving development viability** - The Council should be more flexible – a number of delegates suggested that planning obligations could be relaxed to facilitate the development process and help improve scheme viability. Others suggested that the assessment of viability itself should be reviewed, and that the Council takes a more flexible approach as a means to maintain delivery. Other suggestions included using public land assets more generously and strategically, and retaining flexibility within the Local Investment Plan.
- **Clarity and certainty**- many delegates thought that there was an urgent need for a collective understanding of the new policy context both in terms of the new funding regime as well as the proposed changes to local/national planning policy over the next few years. New tenures should be explored to consider what opportunities for delivery they may offer, and timescales for proposed delivery understood. How to make the new regime deliver for Plymouth.
- **Develop closer relationships between all delivery partners**- having gained a collective understanding of the new environment, it was thought essential that partners work more effectively together to minimise inefficiencies and maximise opportunities for delivery. There was also a suggestion that working more closely with neighbouring authorities might prove helpful.
- **Use New Homes Bonus to deliver more housing**- it was proposed that the anticipated new funds should be used to create a ring-fenced local growth fund to deliver new housing especially for priority regeneration areas.
- **Encourage institutional investment**- this was thought to be an alternative and largely untapped source of funding for the private rental market in particular.

Options and priorities will be subject to further debate regarding agreeing objectives, actions, outcomes and resources as part of the planned growing the city Task & Finish groups.

Context:

Participants in the workshop agreed that the context of this theme was accurately reflected in the 'Options and Choices' paper issued during the conference.

Challenges:

The challenges already identified in the 'Options and Choices' paper were agreed and endorsed, with the following additional challenges raised:

The focus of the workshop was existing private sector housing which represents 80% of all housing in the city. Of this, approximately 60% is owner occupied and 20% private rented (lower and higher respectively compared to the national average).

The Private Sector Housing Stock Conditions report (Dec 2010) identifies that there are:

- 90,000 owner occupied and private rented dwellings, of which
- 30,000 households in non decent dwellings (total estimated repair cost of £170m)
- 10,000 vulnerable households living in non decent dwellings
- 19,000 dwellings have a Category 1 hazard

There is a clear correlation between the areas of worst housing and the most deprived neighbourhoods (across all tenures). Poor housing is a contributor to poor health - both physical and mental - with direct links to life expectancy (e.g. excess winter mortality rates) and child poverty. Poor housing can inhibit children's learning and attainment. Poor housing will present health and safety hazards (such as trips and falls, electrical and gas safety) leading to increased pressures on Care and NHS services, e.g. hospital admissions. Poor energy efficient housing will lead to higher CO2 emissions. Poor housing will not support the growth agenda (e.g. the quality of housing will be a factor in inward investment decisions). Poor housing = poor city.

▪ **Housing condition**

- Private Sector Housing is the silent, often forgotten, majority - how are we going to improve the situation/condition for vulnerable people.
- Large proportion of older housing in Plymouth with some of the worst, including empty and under-utilized property, within the inner city and around the centre.
- Funding to tackle decency in social housing but none for private sector housing.

▪ **Adapted / Accessible Homes**

- Major Adaptations, funded via Disabled Facilities Grant is a mandatory, means tested grant, applied across the city and all tenures (excl. PCH property).
- Resources do not match demand, and demand is growing.
- Lifetime homes only relevant to newly built homes, therefore minimal impact on demand for Major Adaptations. Lifetime homes still require an element of adaptation dependant on the need of the occupier.
- Personalization agenda and re-ablement / intermediate care proposal.
- Need to achieve and demonstrate value for money

▪ **Energy Efficiency / Fuel Poverty**

- Large proportion of older housing in Plymouth is 'hard to treat' presenting difficulties and increased costs to upgrade to meet energy/thermal efficiency.
- Financial Inclusion Strategy Group very interested in tackling housing issues in relation to fuel efficiency and child poverty.
- There are fewer incentives for people in private sector housing to make the alterations necessary to increase energy efficiency. People do not like to be told what to do. Housing Associations have more scope to increase thermal comfort for their tenants.
- Opportunities via Green Deal for conventional energy efficiency measures. Minimal opportunities for vulnerable people to access innovative technologies.

▪ **Funding and Resourcing**

- Potential for less investment in the Private Rented Sector due to changes in benefits, reducing equity and rising interest rates.

- Lack of clarity and certainty around the effect current changes to benefits etc will have on Private Rented Sector.
- Private Sector Renewal Grant (PSRG) has been axed. Therefore there is no Government funding for capital programme from 2011/2012 onward.
- DFG funding will increase with inflation, however with PSRG 'subsidy' withdrawn, the DFG budget will effectively be reduced by 50% next year.
- The Council's ability to address significant issues will be affected by the lack of a capital programme but low cost remedial works could become very effective.

Options:

- **Target resources**
 - Need to focus on the most vulnerable people in the worst housing/areas.
- **Develop initiatives with partners**
 - Links with Adult Social Care and Children's Services
 - Health Colleagues could refer/action issues for home owners.
 - Fire Service
 - Police Service
 - Smoking Cessation
 - Healthy Eating
 - Income maximization
 - GPs
- **Targeted licensing**
 - Uncertainty of the market
 - Impact of the 'under 35's' benefit changes on the private rented sector?
 - Article 4 Direction (planning power to take away permitted development rights)
- **Accreditation of landlords/properties in the private rented sector**
- **Secure a Sustainable funding base for Private Sector Housing Improvements**
- **Adaptations protocol with Housing Associations in Plymouth**
- **Develop 'Housing Advice'**
 - Better signpost options and choices for all to improve their own housing conditions, especially hard to reach, and vulnerable groups
- **Private sector housing improvements**
 - Utilize Section 106 commuted sums funding gained through new house building to improve and retrofit existing housing in the area?
- **Empty Properties**
 - Loans to Sell' and 'Loans to Let'
 - 'HouseLet' & 'EasyLet'
 - Availability of private rented housing to meet the government's proposal to allow councils to discharge its homelessness duty by offering private sector housing.
- **Increased enforcement?**

Some Priorities

- Identify and prioritise who we need to help – (can we establish a common definition of 'vulnerable'?)
- Identify areas of concentrated deprivation – targeted response
- Identify partners/providers – make connections, avoid duplication
- Identify funding – pooling budgets
- Identify referral Pathways – routes to assistance
- Ensure statutory responsibilities are met

Context:

Participants in the workshop agreed that the context of this theme was accurately reflected in the 'Options and Choices' paper issued during the conference.

Challenges:

The challenges already identified in the 'Options and Choices' paper were agreed and endorsed, with the following additional challenges raised:

- **Local Housing Allowance reforms**, the earliest coming into force in April 2011, will severely impact on the affordability and quality of private rented housing.
- **Barriers to move on from supported housing into settled housing** still exist despite extensive work in this area.
- **Lack of an integrated approach to address youth homelessness and supporting young people to access housing.**
- **Acute offender housing issues** – with offenders unable to access housing on release from prison.
- **Need to address local connection issues with regard to service provision in Plymouth** – with the possibility that people with vulnerabilities may be 'imported' into Plymouth due to affordability issues and grant cuts elsewhere.
- **Housing is not currently incorporated fully into the 'localities model' of service delivery** – and this would be helpful in order to establish a fully integrated approach, particularly with adult services.

The group identified favoured options for moving each of these issues forward.

Options:

Workshop participants discussed and reviewed all of the options proposed (both existing ones raised in the options and choices papers, and additional ones raised at the conference) and began the challenging work of defining more closely the actions that would be needed in order to achieve each of the objectives. During a group-work exercise they then identified those that needed to be tackled as a priority. Delegates were asked to consider in their deliberations the particular areas that could most benefit from a partnership approach. The objectives are identified below, in order of priority, as well as the areas that would need to be covered in order to address the objective:

Priority 1: Develop a strategic action plan to plan the city's response to LHA changes:

- Identify who's most at risk from the impact of changes (those who have been supported into accommodation by local services? Those with mental health/learning disability/substance abuse/other vulnerabilities?)
- Make plans for advising and supporting people before and as their benefits change.
- Decide if and how services in the city might contribute to re-housing people as their entitlements change – and whether capacity needs to be freed up to do this.
- Developing a co-ordinated approach to re-housing people (e.g. under 35's gradually going into shared accommodation over the period ahead)
- Plans for advising and supporting landlords before and as their tenants' benefits change including development of a standard approach to negotiating reduced rents.
- Consider links with Discretionary Housing Payments – in particular for supporting clients short-term through transition, or where children are still sitting exams etc.
- Plan ongoing work with landlords and others re. changing market and needs (e.g. likely increased need for HMO's)
- Fully utilise partners input to action planning gained through workshop delivery.

- Agreeing and promoting key messages for workers, tenants and the wider public.

Priority 2: Address move-on barriers for young people leaving supported housing projects:-

- Analysis of demand in the city – to endorse anecdotal reports that it is rising; how much of the demand is coming from outside the city i.e. imported demand? What delays are experienced when young people are ready to move on?
- Impact analysis of the LHA reforms in relation to young people (in particular the extension of single room allowance only to <35 year olds, with this group seen as much more 'attractive' as potential tenants to landlords than younger people.
- Tackle attitudes of landlords to young people – who are seen as being potentially more difficult to manage within an HMO, and student population tend to yield higher rents.

PRIORITIES 1 & 2 SUBJECT OF TASK AND FINISH GROUPS, DATES NOTIFIED TO DELEGATES.

Priority 3: Maximise the use of social housing stock:-

- Work with stakeholders and service users to define who needs a 'home for life'.
- Consider community cohesion concerns, with flexible tenancies meaning that people may have less pride in their home and community (and therefore less pride and involvement in their local area).
- Address under-occupation (voluntary/incentivised schemes) as a means of making social housing more accessible to families.

TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE PLYMOUTH HOUSING SERVICES PARTNERSHIP.

Priority 4: Integrated work to address youth homelessness/access to housing for young people:-

- Convene a 'Youth Forum' that can be attended by partners working with young people across the city.
- Establish relevant strands of work happening independently around young people.
- Formulate an integrated action plan where issues converge, that can feed into the Children and Young People's Plan, Housing Strategy, and other city strategies.
- Develop an integrated approach to planning with service user involvement.

TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS INNOVATION GROUP.

Priority 5: Plan a response to single homeless people to whom nobody owes a statutory duty:-

Priority 6: Explore the potential for housing services to work within localities framework.

Priority 7: Address homelessness issues that are caused by a poor standard of housing.

Priority 8: Plan hospital discharges where patient is homeless at point of discharge.

Priority 9: Ensure that offenders have appropriate access to housing advice/options at all stages of the process (at point of remand, imprisonment, and release from prison).

TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE OFFENDER SERVICES GROUP.

Priority 10: Address family and child poverty issues where they are integrated with, or caused by housing issues.

TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE CHILD POVERTY STRATEGY GROUP.

It was understood by delegates that much of the objectives identified and action planning to meet the objectives will continue in various established partnership forums, and these have been identified where they are known. The Homelessness Action Partnership will consider how to take the other priorities forward at the next meeting in April.

Context:

Participants in the workshop agreed that the context of this theme was accurately reflected in the 'Options and Choices' paper issued during the conference.

Challenges:

The challenges already identified in the 'Options and Choices' paper were agreed and endorsed, as below and additional challenges raised:

(Neighbourhood Regeneration)

1. Narrowing the Gap
 - a) *Where do we work? Targeted neighbourhoods for focused intervention or focus on targeted areas within neighbourhoods?*
 - b) *Do we focus on 'bottom up' issues raised by residents/partners eg liveability/quality of life or should we provide more of a health role to contribute more to reducing health inequalities eg life expectancy, and emerging public health outcomes?*

Setting neighbourhood priorities: Discussion centred around:

- **Need to recognise not everyone engages in groups**
- **Neighbourhood meetings may only be attended if there is something going on**
- **Need for more joint engagement between partners**
- **Local priorities need co-ordinating – information may be being collected in pockets. Action needs to be co-ordinated too.**
- **Better engagement with faith based groups?**

Health inequalities:

- **Youth health seems to be a big priority – young people not engaged, will not attend community meetings**
- **Information may not be being shared adequately**
- **Affordable warmth is an issue**
- **The team should prioritise activities that have the maximum impact**
- **Police will support whatever the wider strategy is at neighbourhood level**
 - 1) *What will the new public health role in Plymouth mean for housing agencies across the City? What could they contribute?*
 - 2) *The Big Society and Localism*

How can the Big Society and new 'localism' approach help improve liveability in Plymouth?

 - a) *Should we support local residents to undertake their own projects?*
 - b) *Should we support the development of 'Community Budgets' to give communities a greater say in how services are delivered?*

Discussion around:

Issues with the idea of Big Society and equality:

- **What happens in the areas of the City that have no community groups? Where are the resources coming from to empower communities to engage in Big Society and Localism?**
- **Difficulty in engaging communities if there is no perception of issues directly affecting them**

Community budgets:

- **Who has the authority to co-ordinate and choose priorities? There may be some strong communities that have greater influence.**

- 3) *What is the best way to engage local residents in improving service provision and influencing decision making?*

Discussion around:

- **Residents may not always want to attend meetings.**
- **Use resident panels where they exist eg with housing providers – surveys**
- **Facebook/social networking sites – excludes certain sections of the population eg older people, those without computers**
 - 4) *Agency resources*
 - a) *Could we be using collective resources more effectively?*

b) *Housing regeneration areas (N Prospect, Devonport): do we need to review priorities for neighbourhood interventions, including possible business arrangements? Do we need a Delivery Plan to combine budgets/services?*

Discussion around:

- **Sharing resources/information better would maximise impact**
- **Need to identify broad brush/targeted interventions**
- **How do we prioritise?**
- **Potentially need to look more at families that need support to promote cohesion and prevent problems occurring/getting worse**

Priorities as identified by the group

1. Agency resources - engagement needs to be considered at strategic level between partners. There needs to be more joined up working and shared resources. Information also needs to be shared more effectively, in order to identify issues and share results within communities

2. Engagement issues and preparing for the 'Big Society'. How do we ensure equality of engagement, and that access to, or influencing, funding, reaches everyone? We have to make being part of anything interesting. There needs to be a willingness to work with the third sector, and openness. Key role of the NRT is to make sure all the right partners are around the table. Engagement in communities needs to be focused – targeted approach. We need to 'make things happen' to maintain engagement.

3. Bottom up (neighbourhood) v top down (City) priorities. Who has responsibility for deciding/setting direction? What has the biggest impact for resources invested?

(Anti-social Behaviour)

Options and Choices

Improve data sharing across agencies particularly around intervention work, include social landlords

Providing victims, particularly vulnerable victims of asb with appropriate support

New Gov't proposals for ASB, how to implement?

Revised Family Intervention Service is their appetite for RSLs and other agencies to 'buy in'?

Discussion around

- Work needs to include addressing perception of ASB, keeping victims informed
- Processes inconsistent across city, clearer process, victim centred approach, better training
- Procedure needs to be adopted by all agencies and feel confident with it
- Need better info sharing between agencies to 'work together' not just at case level
- Needs of victim are considered above that of perpetrator (early intervention key)
- Do not want 'no go' areas in Plymouth, particularly around race etc
- Must make significant and better use of voluntary sector
- Working more closely with the private sector particularly landlords and business
- Use of mentoring and mediation. Also better information about what support is out there, proactive strategies
- Publicise positive outcomes

Priorities

The group identified the following three priorities

- 1. Better communication between agencies at case level, with interventions, and when collecting information through questionnaires, surveys etc**
- 2. Ensuring better all round support for victims and in particular vulnerable victims. Better multi agency communication.**
- 3. Whole family support is provided to families who are at risk due to their ASB.**

Work with Gypsy and Travellers is necessary and delegates offered to be part of work to progress this issue.