



Watford Borough Council

Watford Housing Strategy 2015-2020 Needs Analysis

February 2015



Watford Housing Strategy – Needs Analysis

A) A Picture of Watford

1. Population growth

As a local authority area, Watford is estimated to have had a very high rate of population growth between mid 2012 and mid 2013. It has the highest estimated population growth in Hertfordshire.. The following statistics indicate a net population rise of 3,435 persons between March 2011 and mid 2013, a 3.8% increase:-

- March 2011 total population 90,301 persons
- Mid March 2012 total population estimate 91,732 persons
- Mid March 2013 total population estimate 93,736 persons

The Office for National Statistics estimates that the Watford population experienced net population growth of 2,003 persons between mid 2012 and mid 2013, and that the growth consisted of the following:

- The excess of births over deaths 776 persons 38.5% of the growth
- Net internal in-migration 1,062 person 53.0% of the growth
- Net international in-migration 165 persons 6.2% of the growth

In Hertfordshire Watford had the 5th largest number of births, despite having the 8th largest population in mid 2012.

Qualitative evidence has been obtained which implies that households are moving to Watford from some London boroughs to seek more affordable accommodation, but at present a comprehensive picture of this is not available. Population growth in London boroughs is estimated to have been due predominantly to excess of births over deaths and net international in-migration, while almost all boroughs have seen population loss due to out-migration to other United Kingdom boroughs. The statistics on population change between mid 2012 and mid 2013 estimated that the following north London boroughs had seen out-migration to other United Kingdom boroughs consisting of these numbers:-

- Brent -4,922 persons
- Harrow -2,352 persons
- Barnet -1,732 persons
- Enfield -1,676 persons
- Hillingdon -297 persons

The net in-migration to Watford from other boroughs of 1,062 persons shows considerable variation between the age groups as follows:

| Age group | Increase/decrease in number of persons |
|--|--|
| 0-14 years old | +293 persons |
| 15-19 years old | -222 persons |
| 20-35 years old | +1,008 |
| 35-44 years old | +55 persons |
| 45-59 years old | -81 persons |
| 60-74 years old | -78 persons |
| 75+ years old | +87 persons |
| Overall internal inflow of population | +6,905 persons |
| Overall internal outflow of population | -5,843 persons |
| Net internal inflow of population | +1,062 persons |

This indicates how in-migration to Watford is predominantly of children aged under 14 years and young adults in the 20-35 year old age group. This suggests that housing demand is growing among young families and young single person households.

2. Census 2011 and other demographic data

The growth of younger and older age groups

The Census 2011 shows that Watford has a comparatively young population compared with the East of England region and with England itself:-

| | <i>Watford</i> | <i>East of England</i> | <i>England</i> |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| ▪ 0-4 years old | 7.5% | 6.2% | 6.3% |
| ▪ 5-14 years old | 11.9% | 11.5% | 11.4% |
| ▪ 15-24 years old | 12.2% | 12.2% | 13.1% |
| ▪ 25-44 years old | 33.8% | 26.5% | 27.5% |
| ▪ 45-59 years old | 17.9% | 19.8% | 19.4% |
| ▪ 60+ years old | 16.8% | 23.9% | 22.3% |

In 2011 the wards with the highest percentage of residents who were aged 0-9 years were Holywell at 16.2%, Vicarage at 15.7% and Callowland at 14.6%. In 2011 the wards with the highest percentage of residents who were aged 60 and over were Nascot at 23.3%, Park at 20.6% and Meriden at 20.3%. These wards contain a significant number of housing schemes and residential care homes for older people.

Household types

The 2011 Census revealed that the Single Persons households under pensionable age had become the most frequent household type in Watford, composing 21.1% of all households. The wards with the highest percentages of this type of household were Central at 35.4%, Callowland at 26.5% and Holywell at 24.9%. In 2001 married couples with children composed the most frequent household type in Watford.

Tenure

In March 2011 the tenure structure of Watford's housing stock was composed of the following:-

- Owned outright 24.4% of the housing stock
- Owned with a mortgage 37.2% of the housing stock
- Low cost home ownership 1.2% of the housing stock
- Social Rented 16.3% of the housing stock
- Private Rented 20.1 of the housing stock.
- Other 0.8% of the housing stock
- Total 36,681 households

There have been two very significant changes in terms of tenure:-

- The percentage decline in households who own their homes with a mortgage, from 46.0% in 2001 to 37.2% in 2011.
- The percentage increase in households who are now renting their homes from a private landlord, from 9.8% in 2001 to 20.1% in 2011. Numerically, Watford's private rented sector almost doubled in size between 2001 and 2011. The private rented sector is particularly large in the following wards: Central at 35.1%, Callowland at 30.8% and Vicarage at 30.7%.

Accommodation types and supply

The wards which experienced the highest percentage growth in the supply of unshared homes between 2001 and 2011 were Park at 26.1% increase, Central at 20.1% increase and Holywell at 14.2% increase. The wards which experienced the lowest percentage growth in the supply of unshared homes between 2001 and 2011 were Leggatts at nil growth, Oxhey at 2.0% and Stanborough at 5.0%

Ethnicity

In 2011 the wards which saw the highest percentages of residents from the following ethnic backgrounds were:-

- *White British* . Woodside at 76.5%, Oxhey at 73.8% and Stanborough at 73.3%
- *White Other* . Central at 14.5%, Vicarage at 12.5% and Holywell at 9.8%
- *Asian* . Vicarage at 35.7%, Holywell at 26.8% and Park at 22.2%
- *Black African-Caribbean* - Vicarage at 9.0%, Holywell at 8.0% and Central at 7.4%

In-migration from overseas

The West Watford wards of Vicarage, Holywell and Central have the largest populations of Watford residents from outside the United Kingdom who have arrived since 1991. Of their residents who were born outside the United Kingdom, 80.7% of Central's population arrived since 1991, followed by 75.6% in Vicarage and 72.9% in Holywell. These three wards have higher numbers of small housing stock i.e. containing one or two bedrooms. Prior to 1991 some residents may have lived in Central, Vicarage or Holywell initially, then moved to parts of the borough with larger housing stock.

In terms of the new immigration of residents born in countries admitted to the European Union between April 2001 and March 2011, Central ward appears to have been the most popular destination. In March 2011 of the 3,147 Watford residents born in European countries admitted to the European Union between April 2001 and March 2011, 20.2% lived in Central, 15.6% lived in Vicarage and 11.9% lived in Callowland.

There was relatively small immigration from overseas to Watford between mid 2012 and mid 2013. This consisted of 165 persons, of whom 150 were aged 0-30 years. There was out-migration to an overseas destination of 22 person aged 35-54 years.

The housing-related implications of increasing in-migration from other areas could include greater demand for privately rented homes, as privately rented accommodation is the easily accessible tenure.

Population projections

The Population Projection Unit at the Office for National Statistics has made population projections for each local authority between 2014 and 2020. The projections for Watford are:-

Total population

| | 2014 | 2017 | 2020 |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| 0-14 years old | 18.9% | 21.4% | 21.0% |
| 15-24 years old | 10.5% | 10.2% | 9.5% |
| 25-44 years old | 33.7% | 32.7% | 32.4% |
| 45-59 years old | 18.9% | 18.4% | 19.0% |
| 60+ years old | 17.9% | 17.3% | 18.1% |

Males

| | 2014 | 2017 | 2020 |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| 0-14 years old | 20.8% | 22.0% | 21.6% |
| 15-24 years old | 12.5% | 12.0% | 11.8% |
| 25-44 years old | 33.3% | 32.0% | 31.4% |
| 45-59 years old | 18.8% | 18.0% | 17.6% |
| 60+ years old | 14.6% | 16.0% | 17.6% |

Females

| | 2014 | 2017 | 2020 |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| 0-14 years old | 20.0% | 22.0% | 21.2% |
| 15-24 years old | 12.0% | 10.0% | 11.5% |
| 25-44 years old | 34.0% | 30.0% | 30.8% |
| 45-59 years old | 16.0% | 18.0% | 17.3% |
| 60+ years old | 18.0% | 20.0% | 19.2% |

Outstanding trends from these statistics are:-

- Percentages by age group are not due to change particularly significantly between 2014 and 2020. .
- The steady rise in 0-14 years olds as a percentage of the population.
- The slight, although not significant, rise in the number of older people as a percentage of the population. The rise in the percentage of males aged 60+ is predicted to be much higher than the predicted rise in the percentage of females aged 60+.
- The 15-24 and 25-44 year old age groups are predicted to show a slight decline.

In February 2015 the Office for National Statistics released projections on the number of households. It was predicted that the number of households in each Hertfordshire local authority would grow by the following:-

| | 2015 | 2020 | Numerical growth of households | Percentage growth of households |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Broxbourne | 39,151 | 40,976 | 1,825 | +4.7% |
| Dacorum | 62,854 | 66,442 | 3,588 | +5.7% |
| East Herts | 60,054 | 64,215 | 4,161 | +6.9% |
| Hertsmere | 41,541 | 44,388 | 2,847 | +6.9% |
| North Herts | 56,124 | 59,709 | 3,585 | +6.4% |
| St Albans | 58,474 | 61,844 | 3,370 | +5.8% |
| Stevenage | 36,585 | 38,515 | 1,930 | +5.3% |
| Three Rivers | 36,947 | 39,276 | 2,329 | +6.3% |
| Watford | 38,882 | 41,644 | 2,762 | +7.1% |
| Welwyn Hatfield | 45,710 | 48,337 | 2,627 | +5.7% |

Watford is projected to have the biggest percentage growth of households between 2015 and 2020.

3. Housing Supply

Newly built homes in Watford April 2009 . March 2014

| | Number of new affordable homes | Net housing completions | Affordable housing as a % of net housing completions |
|-----------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 2009/2010 | 224 | 516 | 43.4% |
| 2010/2011 | 356 | 633 | 56.2% |
| 2011/2012 | 95 | 417 | 22.8% |
| 2012/2013 | 184 | 541 | 34.9% |
| 2013/2014 | 82 | 352 | 23.3% |

Gross completions of new homes in Watford by size, April 2009 . March 2014

| | Total | 1 bed | 2 bed | 3 bed | 4+ bed |
|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| 2009/2010 | 540 | 38.8% | 42.8% | 9.5% | 8.9% |
| 2010/2011 | 665 | 42.0% | 41.5% | 6.1% | 10.4% |
| 2011/2012 | 479 | 46.6% | 45.9% | 5.0% | 2.6% |
| 2012/2013 | 568 | 27.1% | 53.0% | 6.7% | 13.2% |
| 2013/2014 | 385 | 35.8% | 41.3% | 13.2% | 9.7% |

A total of 74 new affordable homes are due to be completed between April 2014 and March 2015. However, this number may increase or decrease depending on a range of circumstances such as delays in development.

The need for a wider range of housing options and types

The housing strategy consultation exercises have revealed that demand for housing at all levels in Watford is high.

Demand for traditional affordable housing for rent continues to remain very high. There is clear evidence that households in receipt of low to medium level earnings will rarely be able to afford homes for market sale or market rent. Therefore, development of homes for lettings at a low rent will continue to be encouraged.

However, Watford Council also wishes to encourage the provision of other housing options in addition to the traditional housing options spectrum of Owner-occupation - Low Cost Home Ownership . Private rent from a Buy to Let Landlord . Social Rent. Research into Band E on the housing register (the lowest priority band but containing 75% of housing register applicants) has shown that there are large segments of the population who will have difficult accessing the usual social or market housing, but who have jobs in Watford and contribute to the vitality of the town's economy. The council wishes to work with registered providers to assess the potential for new housing options such as:-

- High quality shared housing and/or houses in multiple occupation.
- Market rent schemes, to remain separate from the main affordable housing programme.

- Niche market for housing for sale to improve housing pathways in Watford, such as the progression from a two bedroom to a three bedroom home, to remain separate from the main affordable housing programme.
- A full range of low cost home ownership options.

Watford is the most densely populated borough in Hertfordshire and one of the most densely populated local authority areas in England. Its density increased from 37.2 persons per hectare in 2001 to 42.1 persons per hectare in 2011. With an overall size of just 2,142 hectare, it is also the smallest local authority area in Hertfordshire. Significantly, it is surrounded by local authority areas whose densities are much lower. For example, the population density figures for neighbouring boroughs in 2011 were:-

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| ▪ Dacorum | 6.8 persons per hectare |
| ▪ Hertsmere | 9.9 persons per hectare |
| ▪ St Albans | 8.7 persons per hectare |
| ▪ Three Rivers | 9.8 persons per hectare |

Although the Census 2011 recorded that 66% of Watford's housing stock still consists of houses, small units containing one and two bedroom have undoubtedly formed a very significant part of Watford's overall development of new homes since 2009:

1 and 2 bedroom homes as a percentage of total development

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| ▪ 2009/2010 | 81.6% |
| ▪ 2010/2011 | 83.5% |
| ▪ 2011/2012 | 92.5% |
| ▪ 2012/2013 | 80.1% |
| ▪ 2013/2014 | 77.1% |

A need for more family-sized homes and lower density housing for older people has been identified and would be appropriate for more peripheral sites in the borough. Watford Council would like to examine the option to work with neighbouring authorities to devise mutually beneficial arrangements for the development of lower density housing as part of cross-boundary initiatives.

4. House prices

House prices in Watford have risen so that they are now equal to some parts of North London. The average house price in Watford was £274,807 in September 2013, rising 18.9% between 2009 and 2013. Further increases are expected as the Croxley Rail Link makes the borough more desirable for investment in residential property.

Equally, there remains pressure on Watford due to its relative affordability compared to surrounding local authority areas such as St Albans, Three Rivers and Hertsmere.

Average costs of lower priced housing (priced at under £300,000)

Regular research exercises have been carried out into the average cost of homes in Watford which have been priced at £300,000 or below. In June 2014 research was carried out into 591 properties in Watford advertised on the Rightmove website which were priced at or below £300,000. The results for each property size were as followed:

| | | |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Studio homes | 9 homes in sample | Mean average price £126,933 |
| • 1 bedroom | 204 homes in sample | Mean average price £170,940 |
| • 2 bedroom | 295 homes in sample | Mean average price £243,471 |
| • 3 bedroom | 83 homes in sample | Mean average price £269,425 |

5. Market Rent levels

In terms of market rent levels, Watford is much more equal with both the surrounding local authority areas and north London boroughs. This may be indicative of the attractiveness of the borough for property investors who purchase houses and flats in order to rent them out. The average market rent in Watford in September 2013 was over £1,000 per month.

Average levels of lower priced rents (below the national maximum level for Local Housing Allowance)

Regular research exercises have been carried out into the average monthly rents of homes in Watford whose rents are at or below national Local Housing Allowance maximum levels. In June 2014 research was carried out into 271 properties in Watford on the Rightmove website whose monthly rents were at or below Local Housing Allowance maximum levels. The results for each property size were as followed:

| | | |
|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| • Studio homes | 22 homes in sample | Mean average rent £614 |
| • 1 bedroom | 97 homes in sample | Mean average rent £801 |
| • 2 bedroom | 112 homes in sample | Mean average rent £1,025 |
| • 3 bedroom | 40 homes in sample | Mean average rent £1,215 |

6. Earnings levels

In 2011 the biggest employment areas for residents of Watford were, in descending order:

- Wholesale and retail, trade, repairs
- Transport, Storage, Communication and Information
- Human Health and Social Work.

The Annual Survey of Household Earnings has recorded that earnings of Watford residents are significantly higher than earnings of Watford employees. This indicates firstly that a proportion of Watford residents commute to work in higher paid occupations in London, and secondly that Watford has a large and thriving service industry whose employees typically have comparatively low earnings.

Research into earnings of Watford-based jobs in July 2014 found the following income levels:-

Lower earnings levels

- Graduate Accounts Administrator £17,000
- Quality Assurance Administrator £18,000 - £20,000
- Marketing Officer £18,000 - £24,000
- HGV Mechanic/Technician £20,000
- Media Sales Executive £20,000
- Chef de Partie £23,000
- Payroll Clerk £23,000 - £26,000
- Graduate Business Trainee £23,000 - £28,000

Median earnings levels

- Test Technician £25,000 - £27,000
- Lettings Negotiator £25,000 - £30,000
- Year 2 Class Teacher £25,000 - £45,000
- Commercial Laundry Engineer £26,000
- Civil Engineer £28,000 - £33,000
- Finance Analyst £30,000 - £40,000
- Pharmaceutical Process Engineer £30,000 - £36,000
- Finance Analyst £34,000 - £40,000
- Bespoke Buyer £35,000 - £38,000
- Assistant Manager £35,000 - £40,000
- Test Engineer £35,000 - £45,000

Higher earnings levels

- Business Analyst £40,000
- Finance Analyst £40,000 - £50,000
- Mechanical Design Engineer £45,000
- Application Support Team Leader £45,000 - £55,000
- Data Scientist £45,000 - £55,000
- Sales Consultants £50,000 - £75,000
- Data Centre Build Manager £55,000 - £60,000

Source:- Universal Job Search website

Comparisons with Sections 4 and 5 show that it would be difficult for a household with only one income to purchase even a lower priced property in Watford.

7. Social Housing in Watford

The Census 2011 recorded a total of 5,979 social rented homes in Watford, and an additional 361 have been built since then. The landlord with the highest amount of social housing stock is Watford Community Housing Trust, owning 4,226 homes in March 2014 which constitutes 66.7% of the borough's total social housing. A total of 3,718 homes were general needs while 508 were designated for older people only.

In addition, as in August 2014 there were 503 homes for low cost home ownership in Watford.

On the housing register band A is the highest priority and band E is the lowest priority. Band B has hitherto contained all homeless households, so tends to provide the highest number of successful bidders for social housing. In June 2014 the numbers on Watford's housing register were as follows:-

| June 2014 | Housing register by bedrooms required (live applications) | | | | |
|-----------|---|------|-----|-----|-------|
| Band | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4/5 | Total |
| A | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| B | 42 | 25 | 8 | 2 | 77 |
| C | 4 | 72 | 10 | 8 | 94 |
| D | 263 | 282 | 172 | 18 | 735 |
| E | 2485 | 1090 | 299 | 15 | 3889 |
| Total | 2799 | 1469 | 489 | 43 | 4800 |

Between April 2013 and March 2014 the numbers of types of social rented housing which were let were as follows:-

| 2013/2014 | Properties let by bedroom size | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Band | 1* | 2 | 3 | 4/5 | Total |
| A | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| B | 39 | 129 | 26 | 2 | 196 |
| C | 3 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 21 |
| D | 49 | 11 | 65 | 4 | 129 |
| E | 40 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 45 |
| Total | 134 | 152 | 100 | 9 | 395 |

*Including 57 homes for older people only.

Watford Borough Council transferred its housing stock to Watford Community Housing Trust in September 2007. Tenants of the former Council-owned housing mostly retained the Right to Buy powers. Right to Buy sales in Watford remained very low during the most acute years of the economic recession between 2008 and 2012. However, in 2012 the Government introduced increased discounts for Right to Buy purchases. The number of homes purchased under the Right to Buy have now risen steeply.

| Time period | Number of Right to Buy sales completed. |
|-----------------------------|---|
| September 2007 . March 2008 | 3 |
| April 2008 . March 2009 | 3 |
| April 2009 . March 2010 | 2 |
| April 2010 . March 2011 | 2 |
| April 2011 . March 2012 | 5 |

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| April 2012 . March 2013 | 19 |
| April 2013 . March 2014 | 28 |
| April 2014 . August 2014 | 16 |

The demand for social housing far exceeds the supply. In addition, social housing turnover has decreased in recent years. A total of 395 homes were let between April 2013 and March 2014, compared to 471 between April 2012 and March 2013.

The Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities greater freedom to set their own policies about who should qualify to go on the waiting list for social housing in their area. This means that they are now able, if they wish, to prevent people who have no need of social housing from joining the waiting list. Authorities are still obliged to ensure that social homes go to the most vulnerable in society and those who need it most.

Watford Council is compiling a new Nominations Policy, to be implemented by the end of 2014. The main changes in the new policy are:

- i) Band E is the lowest priority band on the housing register. Band E applicants will be removed from the housing register and new applicants who would have been Band E will not be able to register. The exceptions are:
 - Tenants in Watford or where Watford Community Housing Trust would have nominations to the resulting vacancy.
 - Home seekers aged over 55 for designated older personsq accommodation only.
- ii) Residency connection . In order to join the housing register applicants must be living in Watford now and have lived here for five out of the last six years. This is a tightening from the previous three out of the last five years or six out of the last twelve months. Employment in Watford or close relatives living in the borough will not now constitute a local connection. Exceptions will include members of the armed forces and tenants of housing associations in Watford.
- iii) Priority for statutory homeless people . Statutory homeless people will now be placed in Band C rather than Band B. This change is part of a plan to prevent homelessness. There will be a reduction in the priority inequality of housing register applicants in overcrowded situations who are sharing with friends or family, and households applying for accommodation under homelessness legislation.

8. Homelessness

The number of households applying for assistance under homelessness legislation has risen significantly between 2008 and 2014.

Total number of households applying for assistance and the outcome of their applications:-

| | 2008/2009 | 2012/2013 | 2013/2014 |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Accepted for assistance | 86 | 154 | 149 |
| Intentionally homeless | 9 | - | 13 |
| Non priority need | 9 | 5 | 11 |
| Not homeless | 20 | 29 | 17 |
| Ineligible | 3 | 1 | - |
| Total | 127 | 189 | 190 |

Reasons for homelessness among households accepted for assistance

| | 2008/2009 | 2012/2013 | 2013/2014 |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Eviction by parents, other family or friends | 32 | 70 | 66 |
| Non-violent relationship breakdown | 4 | 6 | 4 |
| Violent relationship breakdown | 4 | 10 | 9 |
| Other violence or harassment | - | 5 | 2 |
| Mortgage Arrears | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| Rent arrears | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Ending of a privately rented tenancy | 36 | 49 | 59 |
| Leaving an institution e.g. prison, care, asylum seeker accommodation | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| Other | 1 | 6 | 2 |
| Total | 86 | 154 | 149 |

In October 2013 the Watford Council Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan, containing 17 tasks, was approved by the council's Cabinet. The strategy contained an undertaking that the action plan would be reviewed annually.

The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan for 2014/2015, containing ten tasks, is due to be approved by October 2014. Three tasks will be carried over from the 2013/2014 action plan:

- Understanding and improving methods of preventing illegal eviction in the private rented sector.
- Reviewing the Housing Advice Offer in partnership with Customer Services.
- Investigating options to expand the portfolio of temporary accommodation.

Seven new tasks will be introduced:-

- Implementing the new Nominations Policy
- Implementing the new private sector housing discharge policy.
- Introducing a new Communications Strategy in conjunction with the Housing Strategy, to tackle high expectations and high rates of refusals, and to manage demand.
- Contribute towards a corporate Domestic Violence Policy.
- Monitoring the number of evictions from social housing and the number of Discretionary Housing Payments which are ending.
- Ending of funding for the Transitions Service in March 2015 . minimising the impact.
- Review of direct financial assistance to households as a measure of preventing homelessness.

Under previous legislation, people who became homeless were able to refuse offers of accommodation in the private rented sector. The Localism Act lets local authorities meet their homelessness duty by providing good quality private rented homes. A policy will be devised for discharging homelessness duty in the private rented sector. This will specify the standards of accommodation required and the minimum length of tenancy.

9. Temporary Accommodation

The majority of households who apply to Watford Borough Council require temporary accommodation because they have nowhere else to stay. This temporary accommodation will act as their home while they are awaiting the outcome of their homelessness application and, if they have been accepted for assistance, while they are awaiting a successful bid for a settled home through the Choice Based lettings system. Watford Council aims to avoid, as far as possible, the use of bed and breakfast hotels and higher cost temporary housing so that households can use temporary accommodation owned by the council. Watford Council owns a small number of hostels (a total of 59 units) and self-contained homes offering temporary accommodation (13 units). However, the demand for temporary accommodation owned by the council regularly exceeds supply.

Numbers of households in temporary accommodation March-July 2014

| | March | April | May | June | July |
|---|-------|-------|-----|------|------|
| Number of households in temporary accommodation owned by the council * | 69 | 66 | 66 | 68 | 69 |
| Number of households in forming the shortfall housed in other accommodation | 42 | 55 | 59 | 49 | 59 |
| Total | 111 | 121 | 115 | 117 | 128 |

**Totals are less than 72 units because some larger families occupy more than one unit.*

Watford Borough Council's Property Review is due to report at the end of 2014. At present a large number of council-owned assets are used for housing purposes, including temporary accommodation for both homeless households and single person households. The review will assess all council assets to identify the different ways in which they could be used to provide a supply of much needed permanent and temporary accommodation. This will provide options for increasing the supply of housing. A particular need for wheelchair accessible housing has been identified to meet the needs of a full range of households in housing need including disabled persons. The council's own units are not wheelchair accessible. Between April 2011 and March 2014 a total of 17 persons whose priority need consisted of a physical disability were accepted for assistance under homelessness legislation.

The Lifetime Home standard prescribes design criteria relating to the following:- parking, entrances, communal lifts and stairs, internal doors and hallways, circulation space, ground floor living space including the availability of bathroom facilities and bedspaces, the strength of walls, the accessibility of bathrooms, the location and accessibility of service controls, and window heights.

The Wheelchair standard prescribes design criteria related to the following:- circulation space, availability of lifts, doorway widths, the relationship of living, dining and kitchen areas, the accessibility of kitchens, the arrangement of bedrooms, the accessibility of bathrooms, sufficient storage space, and the location and accessibility of service controls.

10. Overcrowding

Overcrowding can be divided into three categories:

- i) One household which is too big for the accommodation in which it is living.

- ii) One household within which a second household has formed e.g. a daughter may have had a baby. The second household is continuing to live with the original household, but is seeking its own accommodation.
- iii) A number of separate households . usually single person households . occupy one dwelling. The most frequent example of this is a house in multiple occupation accommodating a large number of single person households.

The 2011 Census identified the following wards as having the highest rate of occupancy relating to the number of homes which have fewer rooms than the occupying household(s) require:

- Central 25.9% (1,023 homes)
- Holywell 21.8% (755 homes)
- Vicarage 20.0% (596 homes)

The 2011 Census identified the following wards as having the highest rate of occupancy relating to the number of homes which have fewer bedrooms than the occupying household(s) require:

- Vicarage 13.6% (405 homes)
- Holywell 11.7% (403 homes)
- Central 9.2% (364 homes)

The increase in the supply of homes in each ward between 2001 and 2011 was broadly consistent with the growth in the number of households in each ward. The exception to this was Vicarage which saw a 12.4% increase in the number of households between 2001 and 2011, yet saw an increase of only 5.6% in the number of unshared dwellings during the same period. Population density in Vicarage increased from 75.3% persons per hectare in 2001 to 87.0 persons per hectare in 2011.

In April 2014 a study was carried out of households on Watford's housing register who were seeking family-sized accommodation with three or four bedrooms (excluding Band E housing applicants). A total of 100 households were included in the study, and 89 were registered for housing because of overcrowding.

Type of overcrowding

- Three children in a two bedroom home 50 households
- Two children in a two bedroom home 26 households
- Four children in a two bedroom home 10 households
- Three children in a three bedroom home 3 households
- Two children in a three bedroom home 3 households
- Three children in a one bedroom home 2 households
- Two children in a one bedroom home 2 households
- Four children in a three bedroom home 2 households
- One child in a one bedroom home 1 household
- No children in a three bedroom home 1 household

Tenure of households

- Social housing tenant 56 households
- Private rented tenant 41 households
- Living with family 2 households
- Owner-occupier 1 household

Wards in which the households were living

- Holywell 27 households
- Central 14 households
- Callowland 13 households
- Leggatts 7 households
- Meriden 7 households
- Park 7 households
- Stanborough 7 households
- Nascot 6 households
- Vicarage 6 households
- Woodside 3 households
- Tudor 2 households
- Oxhey 1 household

Research has shown that overcrowding is concentrated disproportionately in certain parts of the borough, particularly the south west wards of Vicarage and Holywell. These districts are also where the supply of large family-sized affordable housing is lowest. The council will take a proactive approach to seek possible sites for the development of larger affordable homes in and around these areas.

11. The condition of privately owned housing

The new Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy will guide action towards those activities which are most likely to have a major impact in improving privately owned housing in Watford. The policy will identify the different alternatives such as programmes and spending priorities. It will provide guidance on choosing among options according to the beneficial impact they will have.

The current Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy was devised in 2006. A new policy needs to be devised to meet new challenges such as the Health and Wellbeing agenda, new opportunities for funding, The Green Deal, the increase in the size of the private rented sector, and the likely demand for more shared housing and homes in multiple occupation.

Options which will be considered in the new Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy are:

- Loans vs Grants
- Property based services vs people based services
- Whole home Decent Homes Standard vs remedying Category 1 hazards only.
- Borough-wide schemes vs ward and neighbourhood schemes.

- Borough-wide schemes vs schemes based on particular types or age of housing stock.
- Universal eligibility schemes vs selective eligibility schemes.
- Limited advertising services vs proactive advertising of services.
- Increased prosecution of landlords for poor practice and/or illegal eviction.
- Restriction of houses in multiple occupation of homes vs allowing the market to operate freely.

Street Improvement Project

A pilot plan is being devised for a Street Improvement Project for the area around Cassio Road, Whippendell Road and Marlborough. This has been identified as an area in need of both housing and environmental improvement. A cross-departmental team has been assembled to progress the project.

Stock Condition Survey

Section 3 of the Housing Act 2004 imposes an obligation upon local authorities to keep information on privately rented housing under review.

The last Private Sector Stock Condition Survey was carried out in 2009. Its headline findings included:

- Watford has an older property profile than the national average, with 53.8% built before 1944.
- Of the total number of non decent dwellings, Watford has a higher proportion than average occupied by vulnerable people.
- The highest number of vulnerable people in non-decent dwellings are in pre 1945 housing stock.
- The average SAP rating in Watford is 53.
- 26.3% fail the Decent Homes standard . cost implications are in excess of £34 million overall, and an average of £3,253 per failing property.

The aims of a new Stock Condition Survey might include;-

- To provide housing stock model data for every dwelling in the privately owned housing stock. The information will include Housing Health and Safety Rating System Category 1 hazards, the hazard of excess code, and fuel poverty.
- To develop a comprehensive housing stock database.
- To link the different data sets together to create the database.

Service take-up

Take-up of services in Watford can be very variable between particular areas. Examples of the variation in take-up of particular schemes are as follows:-

| | Homes receiving assistance through the Handyman Service, April 2011 . December 2013 | Decent Homes Assistance 2008-2013 |
|-------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Woodside | 7 | 7 |
| Stanborough | 4 | 1 |
| Meriden | 3 | 1 |
| Leggatts | 6 | 5 |
| Tudor | 6 | 1 |
| Callowland | 5 | 4 |
| Nascot | 2 | 2 |
| Park | 2 | - |
| Central | 10 | 7 |
| Vicarage | 17 | 12 |
| Holywell | 4 | 4 |
| Oxhey | 2 | 2 |

| | Disabled Facilities Grants made to privately owned homes, 2009-2014 | Number of insulation works (loft and cavity wall) carried out. |
|-------------|---|--|
| Woodside | 23 | 258 |
| Stanborough | 11 | 148 |
| Meriden | 29 | 341 |
| Leggatts | 25 | 121 |
| Tudor | 11 | 45 |
| Callowland | 11 | 103 |
| Nascot | 13 | 191 |
| Park | 13 | 201 |
| Central | 10 | 44 |

| | | |
|----------|----|-----|
| Vicarage | 16 | 62 |
| Holywell | 23 | 129 |
| Oxhey | 2 | 191 |

The Housing Pathways Survey, carried out in June and July 2014, surveyed Watford residents on what they liked about their current homes and what they did not like. A total of 97 residents submitted a reply, of whom 41 (42.3%) were aged 55 and over. A total of 70 respondents (72.2%) either owned their home or rented privately. When asked what they did not like about their current home, a total of 17 respondents stated that they were concerned about the condition of their home:-

“Damp inside the flat, especially in winter.”

“Needs a new roof”

“There are no ventilation fans so mould is an issue particularly in the bathroom, even with the windows open.”

“Rising damp, mould in carpets, wardrobe and cupboards.”

“Windows need replacing and there is dampness on the back wall.”

“Solid brick walls so installing insulation becomes more complicated.”

“Dangerously under-maintained. Landlord refuses to contact me as a tenant.”

“It is old and needs a lot of work doing to it which financially I cannot afford.”

“It is cold, damp and needs a lot of work to bring it up to date.”

“As it is old I have high maintenance and energy costs.”

“The bathroom needs refurbishment, and the bath, sink and toilet need replacement.”

“It needs a lot of work and maintenance, but as a tenant I lack the rights to ensure that these issues are dealt with.”

“Lack of insulation.”

“It was built around 1900, so many floors and walls are not level. There are lots of cracks. It needs regular maintenance.”

“Refurbishment of the property needed (door and windows required).”

“As I’m disabled and need to use a wheelchair, it is a struggle to get in and out as I have no ramp. Also, my kitchen needs to have some adaptations so I would be able to use the cupboards properly.”

12. Disabled Facilities Grants

Disabled Facilities Grants are a means tested grant that enables the home of home owning and private tenants who have some form of physical or sensory impairment to be adapted to meet their needs. The number of homes receiving completed works per calendar year were:-

- 2009 20 properties
- 2010 27 properties
- 2011 39 properties
- 2012 49 properties
- 2013 40 properties
- 2014 to 31 March 12 properties

The most adaptations carried out most frequently between January 2009 and March 2014 were:-

- Level access showers 77 works carried out
- Stairlifts 54 works carried out
- Other bathroom adaptations 20 works carried out
- Ramp installations 15 works carried out
- Door openers 14 works carried out
- Ground floor extensions 11 works carried out

Expenditure on Disabled Facilities Grants has been:-

- April 2013 . March 2014 £350,448.18
- April 2012 . March 2013 £295,613.24

13. The Private Rented Sector

Watford's private rented sector is a major priority for policy development and strategic intervention for the following reasons:-

- The sector more than doubled in size between 2001 and 2011, increasing from 3,170 properties (9.8% of the housing stock) to 7,371 properties (20.1% of the housing stock). This growth was due mostly to the movement of existing housing stock from other tenures (mostly owner-occupation with a mortgage) instead of newly built housing. Property investment and Buy-to-Let mortgages also propelled this tenure growth. Estate agents advise that the sector is likely to expand further, partly because of the demand for privately rented housing and partly because Watford is an increasingly attractive town for residential property investment. In the Watford wards of Central, Vicarage and Callowland the private rented sector composed more than 30% of the housing stock by March 2011.
- With the decreasing turnover of social rented housing stock in Watford, the private rented sector is increasingly seen as an option for discharging the local authority duty under homelessness legislation. A Private Sector Discharge Duty will set out the formal policy for this.

- Between April 2013 and March 2014 the ending of a privately rented tenancy became the single biggest reason for homelessness. Research into these cases reveal that tenants had often had little knowledge of their rights, and that illegal eviction was often due to a landlord's lack of knowledge of their obligations, such as serving the correct period of notice.
- Between April 2013 and March 2014 Environmental Health carried out work to deal with 173 households in Watford who had been experiencing difficulties as a tenant of the private rented sector. The numbers were distributed by ward as follows:-

| | |
|---------------|----|
| ○ Woodside | 4 |
| ○ Stanborough | 8 |
| ○ Meriden | 4 |
| ○ Leggatts | 9 |
| ○ Tudor | 6 |
| ○ Callowland | 17 |
| ○ Nascot | 12 |
| ○ Park | 5 |
| ○ Central | 46 |
| ○ Vicarage | 29 |
| ○ Holywell | 26 |
| ○ Oxhey | 7 |

- A consultation exercise carried out with Environmental Health officers revealed that dealing with issues in the private rented sector required not only technical property-based knowledge from officers but also the ability and capacity to provide support and advocacy on behalf of the tenants.

There is considerable potential for a tailored communications strategy to disseminate information on rights and responsibilities to both landlords and tenants, and also for a more comprehensive advice service to be provided.

The Housing Team and the Environmental Health team both make major contributions to the Council's work to improve the customer experience of residents and tenants of privately owned housing. A joint plan will be agreed to improve the co-ordination of roles when dealing with cross-cutting issues such as overcrowding and illegal eviction.

14. Empty Homes

In June 2014 a total of 175 residential properties in Watford which had been empty for 12 months or more were identified:

Number in each ward

| | | |
|---------------|---------------|------|
| ▪ Woodside | 4 properties | 2.3% |
| ▪ Stanborough | 9 properties | 5.1% |
| ▪ Meriden | 13 properties | 7.4% |

| | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------|
| ▪ Leggatts | 6 properties | 3.4% |
| ▪ Tudor | 17 properties | 9.7% |
| ▪ Callowland | 16 properties | 9.1% |
| ▪ Nascot | 16 properties | 9.1% |
| ▪ Park | 17 properties | 9.7% |
| ▪ Central | 38 properties | 21.7% |
| ▪ Vicarage | 15 properties | 8.6% |
| ▪ Holywell | 9 properties | 5.1% |
| ▪ Oxhey | 15 properties | 8.6% |

Numbers by reason for being empty

| | | |
|---|---------------|-------|
| ▪ Empty Class B (last use was by either a charity or a housing association) | 79 properties | 45.1% |
| ▪ Empty unoccupied and unfurnished | 40 properties | 22.9% |
| ▪ Exempt (either left empty by a deceased person or a repossession) | 25 properties | 14.3% |
| ▪ Long term empty premium | 23 properties | 13.1% |
| ▪ Empty uninhabitable/Major Works being carried out. | 7 properties | 4.0% |
| ▪ Standard 50% empty | 1 property | 0.8% |

These statistics include 11 homes which are designated for older people only.

15. Home energy efficiency

Home energy efficiency is a major part of the Government's housing-related policy agenda. As Watford has a higher proportion of older housing stock than all other Hertfordshire local authorities, research has been carried out into where the most energy inefficient housing stock is located.

The following data from the Census 2011 shows the percentage of households per ward who do not have central heating:-

| Ward | No of households | Number of households without central heating | % of households without central heating |
|-------------|------------------|--|---|
| Woodside | 3,002 | 60 | 2.0% |
| Stanborough | 2,792 | 35 | 1.3% |
| Meriden | 3,229 | 77 | 2.4% |
| Leggatts | 2,774 | 63 | 2.3% |
| Tudor | 2,456 | 70 | 2.9% |
| Callowland | 3,161 | 196 | 6.2% |

| | | | |
|----------|-------|-----|------|
| Nascot | 3,173 | 44 | 1.4% |
| Park | 2,938 | 30 | 1.0% |
| Central | 3,948 | 126 | 3.2% |
| Vicarage | 2,971 | 101 | 3.4% |
| Holywell | 3,460 | 120 | 3.5% |
| Oxhey | 2,777 | 55 | 2.0% |

Information was gathered on which age of homes were most likely to suffer from low energy efficiency ratings, and which age of homes were most likely to have a large gap between their actual energy rating and their potential energy rating. The information was gathered from Energy Performance Certificate for homes in Watford on the Right Move website in December 2013.

The Current Energy Efficiency rating of each home (1 = lowest and 100 = highest)

| | Rating 0-20 | Rating 21-40 | Rating 41-60 | Rating 61-70 | Rating 71-80 | Rating 81-100 | Total |
|---------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-------|
| Pre-1919 | 2 1.6% | 6 4.9% | 62 50.8% | 35 28.7% | 15 12.3% | 2 1.6% | 122 |
| 1920s & 1930s | 1 1.1% | 11 12.0% | 50 54.3% | 23 25.0% | 6 6.5% | 1 1.1% | 92 |
| 1940s & 1950s | - | - | 13 38.2% | 12 35.3% | 9 26.5% | - | 34 |
| 1960s & 1970s | - | 4 8.9% | 15 33.3% | 16 35.6% | 8 17.8% | 2 4.4% | 45 |
| 1980s & 1990s | - | 1 1.2% | 11 12.9% | 31 36.5% | 34 40.0% | 8 9.4% | 85 |
| 2000s & 2010s | - | - | 1 1.2% | 14 17.1% | 29 35.4% | 38 46.3% | 82 |

The properties which rank lowest in terms of energy efficiency ratings are those built in the 1920s and 1930s with 67.4% rated at 60 or less, followed by home built pre-1919 with 57.3% rated at 60 or less. Homes built in the 1920s and 1930s tend to have more external walls as a high proportion are detached or semi-detached. Homes built pre-1919 tend to have less external walls as a very high proportion are terraced.

The difference between the Current Energy Efficiency rating of each home and the identified Potential Energy Efficiency rating of each home

| | Difference 0-5 | Difference 6-10 | Difference 11-15 | Difference 16-20 | Difference 21-25 | Difference 26+ | Total |
|---------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|-------|
| Pre-1919 | 27 22.3% | 21 17.4% | 20 16.5% | 12 9.9% | 12 9.9% | 29 24.0% | 121 |
| 1920s & 1930s | 13 14.4% | 12 13.3% | 12 13.3% | 8 8.9% | 13 14.4% | 32 35.6% | 90 |
| 1940s & 1950s | 6 17.6% | 4 11.8% | 8 23.5% | 1 2.9% | 8 23.5% | 7 20.6% | 34 |
| 1960s & 1970s | 7 15.9% | 7 15.9% | 17 38.6% | 5 11.4% | 5 11.4% | 3 6.8% | 44 |
| 1980s & 1990s | 37 43.5% | 22 25.9% | 11 12.9% | 8 9.4% | 5 5.9% | 2 2.4% | 85 |
| 2000s & 2010s | 67 81.7% | 8 9.8% | 5 6.1% | 2 2.4% | - | - | 82 |

Homes built in the 1920s and 1930s show the highest potential for energy efficiency improvement with 35.6% of homes in the sample having a gap between actual and potential energy efficiency of at least 26 points, while 24.0% of homes built before 1919 have a points gap of at least 26 between actual and potential energy efficiency.

Watford has a wide range of housing stock. Borough-wide housing schemes, have been successful in encouraging take-up of more low cost energy efficiency measures in certain wards than others. Take-up of measures has been highest where there is a prevalence of stock type which is easier to improve (e.g. more homes built with cavity walls). Examples of these wards are Meriden, Woodside and Park. Other wards with a high level of solid wall homes, such as Tudor, Central and Vicarage, have seen a smaller number of homes receiving energy efficiency improvement works. External wall insulation will now be the focus of localised and targeted energy efficiency schemes.

In 2013/2014 a successful scheme was carried out to improve the energy efficiency of solid wall homes on the Boundary Way estate in Woodside.

16. Health issues

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation for 2010 identified four Watford neighbourhoods as ranking as within the 25% most deprived in England in terms of Health and Disability (Number 1 means the most deprived in England and number 32,482 means the least deprived). The neighbourhoods are:-

| Neighbourhood | Ward | Ranking in terms of Health and Disability |
|---------------|----------|---|
| 010A | Vicarage | 6,357 |

| | | |
|------|---------|-------|
| 009C | Central | 6,693 |
| 003D | Meriden | 7,090 |
| 009B | Central | 7,992 |

The Health Profile for Watford in 2011 identified Watford as having a higher than average number of hip fractures sustained through a fall. Of the 70 hip fractures which took place in Watford during that year, 45 took place in the home. Older people were disproportionately affected . the average age of a woman in Watford sustaining a high fracture was 84.6 and the average age of a man in Watford sustaining a hip fracture was 84.5. A total of 97.8% of those who sustained a hip fracture due to a fall were aged 60 and over.

The Health Profile for Watford in 2014 showed that Watford has, over a three year period, a much higher than average rate of excess winter deaths. This translates into 58 extra deaths each year, an excess of 28.9%, slightly less than the worst English local authority excess of 32.1%. Further work needs to be undertaken to identify the home improvements which could lessen this excess.

In July 2014 One Watford, Watford's Local Strategic Partnership, agreed the following Public Health Priorities for Watford:-

- a) Improve access to help with alcohol issues.
- b) Increase exercise and weight management
- c) Improve availability of screening in Primary Care for Tuberculosis and Sexual Health.
- d) Safe healthy food
- e) Continued focus on delivering health outcomes through *safe and healthy homes*.
- f) Local or emerging issues that arise from further or local research.

The need for improvements to existing homes for older people

The Health Profile for Watford in 2011 identified Watford as having a higher than average number of hip fractures sustained through a fall. Of the 70 hip fractures which took place in Watford during that year, 45 took place in the home. Older people were disproportionately affected . the average age of a woman in Watford sustaining a high fracture was 84.6 and the average age of a man in Watford sustaining a hip fracture was 84.5. A total of 97.8% of those who sustained a hip fracture due to a fall were aged 60 or over.

The Health Profile for Watford in 2014 showed that Watford has, over a three year period, a much higher than average rate of excess winter deaths. This translates into 58 extra deaths each year, an excess of 28.9%, slightly less than the worst English local authority excess of 32.1%. Further work needs to be undertaken to identify the home improvements which could lessen this excess.

17. Older People

In mid 2014 an assessment was carried out of the supply of and demand for accommodation in Watford which was designated for older people only. There is a large number of sheltered schemes which are outdated in terms of property sizes, bedroom availability and the type of facilities. The findings on supply consisted of the following:-

- 20 social rented schemes of sheltered housing containing a total of 681 self-contained flats.
- 9 private housing schemes of low support housing schemes, containing a total of 418 self-contained flats.
- 1 Extra Care social rented scheme, containing a total of 31 flats.
- 13 residential care or nursing homes, containing a total of 717 places.

The findings on demand consisted of the following:-

- Social rented housing . generally low demand with a small number of bids for properties which became available.
- Private housing schemes for older people were quite difficult to sell, as evidenced by interviews with estate agents. This is particularly the case with schemes containing very little car parking and mostly one bedroom flats. Some private flats for older people for sale were included on the empty homes list.
- The biggest demand for housing among older people was for bungalows.

The statistics on estimated population growth/decline from the Office for National Statistics for mid-2012 to mid 2013 showed that Watford is likely to have been experiencing a decrease in its %younger older+population aged between 60 and 74.

Extra Care/ Flexi Care is defined as:- *housing designed with the needs of frailer older people in mind and with varying levels of care and support available on site. It comes in a number of built forms included flats, bungalow estates and retirement villages. It can sometimes provide a good alternative to a residential care home. Domestic support and personal care is available, usually provided by on-site staff but can also be provided by external sources.*

It is recommended that Watford's supply of social rented Extra Care housing for older people is expanded in order to increase the supply of housing options for older people and to promote a long-term, high quality, adaptable housing options to be considered by Watford's %younger older+residents.

18. Communications

An effective communication strategy is key to achieving the vision and aims within the housing strategy. It can achieve the following:-

- Influence expectations on the availability of social rented housing and any changes which have been made to eligibility/allocation criteria. This has particular relevance to the new Nominations Policy and Private Sector Discharge Policy.

- Educate the customer base on the range of housing options available, so social rented housing is not seen as the only choice.
- Improve perceptions of certain housing options which might have been poorly regarded, such as the private rented sector, houses in multiple occupation, sheltered housing.
- Publicise services and encourage their take-up, such as the services provided to improve the condition of privately owned housing stock.

Generation Y, born between 1980 and 2000, is now accustomed to using the Social Media for giving and receiving communication. Generation Z, members of whom were born since 2000 and will shortly become housing service customers, are likely to view the internet and Social Media as even more integral parts of their lives. Generation Y (household heads aged between 16 and 34) is highly represented among the housing services' traditional client groups. In August 2013 this generation was represented as follows on the housing register:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Seeking one bedrooms | 52.2% of household heads |
| • Seeking two bedrooms | 67.8% of household heads |
| • Seeking three bedrooms | 32.2% of household heads |
| • Seeking four bedrooms | 45.8% of household heads. |

Children's centres who work with young families and local organisations who work with single person homeless people report that use of mobile devices among their client groups is widespread. There are high levels of proficiency in using the Social Media, especially Facebook, for social purposes. Users tend to be not so effective in using it for activities such as applying for housing, downloading documents and applying for benefits.

The older generation may prefer to use more traditional methods of communication such as meetings, phone calls, leaflets, information booklets and letters.

Technological options continue to evolve. The I-phone and Twitter have been the major innovations since 2009. Much greater use is now being made of mobile devices by the population, and websites and apps are now more adaptable to this. It is predicted that there could be more widespread use of technologies such as Google Glass and Instagram in public services. Social landlords are continuing to expand the ways in which Facebook can be used by their customers.

There needs to be continued exploration of how communication technologies can be used to meet the vision and aims of the housing strategy. In order to achieve the aims of the housing strategy in focusing on the whole housing market, the council will need to communicate with a much wider range of groups, such as potential market renters and owner-occupiers.

Major Projects in Watford – current and potential

The following major projects are the focus of economic and housing growth in Watford:-

The Croxley Rail Link . In 2013 Hertfordshire County Council and London Underground were granted the legal powers to build, operate and maintain the Croxley Rail Link. This £118 million scheme will be the largest infrastructure project Hertfordshire County Council has delivered and the first new railway built in Hertfordshire since 1925.

The scheme will see the Metropolitan Line in Watford re-routed and extended to Watford Junction via Watford High Street. New stations will be provided on the new rail link at Ascot Road and at Vicarage Road to serve the Watford General Hospital and the new Health Campus.

The new rail link will support growth and economic development in south west Hertfordshire as well as improving connections into London and reducing pressure on Watford's road network. The target date for trains to start running on the new link is 2017.

Watford Health Campus . The Watford Health Campus is an opportunity to improve a large area surrounding Watford General Hospital running down from Vicarage Road to Wiggenghall Road, much of which has been derelict and unused. The aim of the scheme is to create new jobs, homes and accessible green space to West Watford.

Over a 15-20 year period the Health Campus will deliver:

- Approximately 700 quality homes, including affordable accommodation.
- New business and work opportunities, with premises and facilities to attract new businesses to West Watford and creating up to 1,600 new jobs.
- Attractive new landscaped spaces including riverside walks and new wildlife habitats.
- The opportunity for new hospital facilities, with an improved road network and better use of space to offer greater flexibility for the hospital's future plans.

Kier has been appointed as the development partner for the project.

Charter Place . Watford's already high quality retail offer will be enhanced by the development of Charter Place which was built in the 1970s. The redevelopment will include:

- New high quality retail outlets
- A new nine screen cinema and additional leisure venues
- A new restaurant quarter
- A new enclosed market.

Completion is due to start in 2015, with the new development scheduled to open in 2017.

Office Development in Watford

Watford is the key office market in Hertfordshire, but there is a growing level of competition from other local authorities.

Watford needs more large office development. The town has a very limited supply of large premises. In Clarendon Road, which is still the core office centre, offices are usually split into smaller premises.

As a popular business and industrial location, Watford benefits from strategic proximity to the M1 and M25. However, the existing office and business premises are now expensive and dated, and competition to attract firms is being provided by local authorities such as Dacorum and Milton Keynes.

The Energy Performance requirements which will be in force from 2018 may mean that some Watford business premises will be unviable, particularly those built before 1980.

Profiles of wards in Watford

| | Woodside |
|--|---|
| Tenures | A high proportion of social housing (25.7%), especially family-sized. |
| Condition/ Age | A high proportion of housing built in the 1920s and 1930s |
| Supply and demand | A shortage of general needs flats. Retirement complexes for older people not popular. High demand for bungalows. |
| Housing need | An area of origin for a comparatively high number of households who have become homeless because of parents or other family eviction. |
| Recent development | 5.7% increase in the number of homes between 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | High take-up of Disabled Facilities Grants and Energy Efficiency Grants. |

| | Stanborough |
|-----------------------|---|
| Tenures | A high proportion of homes owned with a mortgage (41.2%) |
| Condition/ Age | A high proportion of housing built in the 1930s |
| Supply and | A shortage of general needs flats. Retirement complexes for older |

| | |
|--|---|
| demand | people not popular. High demand for bungalows. |
| Housing need | An area of origin for a comparatively high number of households who have become homeless because of parents or other family eviction. |
| Recent development | 5.0% increase in the number of unshared homes between 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | Generally low take-up of services. |

| | |
|--|--|
| | Meriden |
| Tenures | The highest amount of social rented housing in Watford (33.7%). |
| Condition/ Age | A high number of 1950s and 1960s built housing, and a moderately high number of 1930s built homes. |
| Supply and demand | A large number of young families in the area. |
| Housing need | An area of origin for a comparatively high number of households who have become homeless because of parents or other family eviction. Contains a lower super output area which is in the top 25% most deprived in England in terms of overall deprivation. |
| Recent development | 12.7% growth in the number of unshared homes between 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | Very high take-up of Disabled Facilities Grants and Energy Efficiency Grants. |

| | |
|--|---|
| | Leggatts |
| Tenures | A high proportion of social rented housing in the ward (22.2%). |
| Condition/ Age | A high proportion of homes built in the 1920s or in the 1980s and 1990s. |
| Supply and demand | The location for low demand 1980s and 1990s built flats. |
| Housing need | An area of origin for a comparatively high number of households who have become homeless because of parents or other family eviction. |
| Recent development | Nil% rise in the number of homes in the ward between 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | High take-up of Disabled Facilities Grants, medium take-up of Energy Efficiency Grants. |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| | Tudor |
| Tenures | A high percentage of owner-occupation at 75.9%. A total of 40.8% is |

| | |
|--|--|
| | owned outright while 35.1% is owned with a mortgage. |
| Condition/ Age | A predominance of 1930s built semi-detached housing. A high proportion of energy inefficient housing. |
| Supply and demand | Bungalows in very high demand and very low supply. 1990s built Reeds development very popular for private renting. |
| Housing need | A comparatively high proportion of older people. |
| Recent development | 8.4% rise in the number of unshared homes in the ward between 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | Low take-up of all services |

| | |
|--|--|
| | Callowland |
| Tenures | Very large private rented sector in the ward (30.8%). The highest proportion of owner-occupation with a mortgage in the borough (44.6%). |
| Condition/ Age | Very high number of 19 th century terraced homes. Large number of 1990s built flats. |
| Supply and demand | A new young affluent professional population is choosing to live in 19 th century terraced homes. 19 th century terraced houses very popular for both sale and Buy to Let landlords. |
| Housing need | Residents usually have problems upsizing from two bedroom housing to three bedroom housing. The location of low demand 1990s built flats. |
| Recent development | 8.7% rise in the number of unshared homes in the ward between 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | Low take-up of all services |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| | Nascot |
| Tenures | A high percentage of owner-occupation at 69.3%. A total of 32.2% is owned outright while 37.1% is owned with a mortgage. |
| Condition/ Age | A mix of housing of all ages. |
| Supply and demand | Highest number of housing schemes for older people in the borough. Very high house prices. |
| Housing need | Very high levels of under-occupation. A lack of attractive downsizing options for older people. High proportion of older people in the ward |
| Recent | 11.5% rise in the number of unshared homes in the ward between |

| | |
|--|--|
| development | 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | Medium take-up of Disabled Facilities Grants and Energy Efficiency Grants. |

| | Park |
|--|--|
| Tenures | The highest percentage of owner occupation in the borough at 77.2%. A total of 48.7% is owned outright while 39.6% is owned with a mortgage. |
| Condition/ Age | A higher proportion of larger homes built in the 1920s and 1930s |
| Supply and demand | Very high house prices. Recent developments of low cost home ownership homes. |
| Housing need | Very high levels of under-occupation. A lack of attractive downsizing options for older people. High proportion of older people in the ward. |
| Recent development | 26.1% rise in the number of unshared homes in the ward between 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | Very high take-up of energy efficiency grants. Very low take-up of other services. |

| | Central |
|--|---|
| Tenures | Highest proportion of privately rented homes in the borough (35.1%). |
| Condition/ Age | Very high proportion of purpose built flats and converted flats. High proportion of 19 th century terraced homes. A large number of flats built in the 2000s and 2010s |
| Supply and demand | Has seen a very rapid growth in the numbers of households and homes between 2001 and 2011. Very large number of single person households. |
| Housing need | Contains a lower super output area which is in the top 25% most deprived neighbourhoods in England. Has a high level of overcrowding. |
| Recent development | 20.1% rise in the number of homes in the ward between 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | Medium take-up of Handy person service, low take-up of other services. |

| | Vicarage |
|--|---|
| Tenures | High proportion of privately rented homes (30.7%). |
| Condition/ Age | Very high number of 19 th century terraced homes. High number of terraced homes converted to flats. |
| Supply and demand | Outside investors viewing the area for future investment when the new metropolitan railway and the Health Campus are complete. |
| Housing need | Largest amount of overcrowding in Watford. |
| Recent development | 5.6% rise in the number of homes in the ward between 2001 and 2011. (This compares with a 12.4% rise in the number of households in the ward over the same period.) |
| Private Housing Service take-up | Between 2008 and 2013 the ward which received the highest number of Decent Homes grants. Highest take-up of the Handyperson service between 2011 and 2013. Low take-up of other services. |
| Special policy areas | Contains part of the Special Policy Area of the Watford Health Campus. |

| | Holywell |
|--|--|
| Tenures | Second largest concentration of social housing in Watford (29.0%). |
| Condition/ Age | High number of 19 th century terraced homes. High number of 1950s and 1960s built homes. Very high proportion of purpose-built flats. |
| Supply and demand | The most populous ward in Watford. |
| Housing need | An area of origin for a comparatively high number of households who have become homeless because of parents or other family eviction. |
| Recent development | 14.2% rise in the number of unshared homes in the ward between 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | Low take-up of all services |
| Special policy area | Contains part of the Special Policy Area of the Watford Health Campus. Contains the Special Policy Area of Ascot Road. |

| | Oxhey |
|-------------------|--|
| Tenures | A high percentage of owner-occupation at 70.4%. A total of 30.0% is owned outright while 40.4% is owned with a mortgage. |
| Condition/ | A high number of larger 19 th century houses . detached and semi- |

| | |
|--|--|
| Age | detached. Contains a large amount of social housing built in the 1920s. |
| Supply and demand | A high proportion of older people. |
| Housing need | |
| Recent development | 2.0% rise in the number of unshared dwellings in the ward between 2001 and 2011. |
| Private Housing Service take-up | Medium take-up of energy efficiency grants, very low take-up of other services. |

B) The Themes

Theme 1: Improving the supply of housing

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Summary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A small borough with high pressure on sites and infrastructure. ➤ A borough which is rapidly and visibly improving and becoming more desirable. ➤ A more rapid population growth than neighbouring local authorities. ➤ Major projects relating to housing, employment and facilities. ➤ Residential property in Watford is attractive to investors. ➤ Housing costs, in terms of rents and prices, are increasing, although are still lower than most parts of London. ➤ Homelessness has been increasing in Watford. This increase is due particularly to the ending of tenancies in the private rented sector. ➤ Government funding for newly built affordable housing has been reduced since 2010. ➤ Watford Borough Council has a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation for homeless households. Demand for temporary accommodation exceeds supply. |
|----------------|--|

Priorities:-

1. To influence the type of new housing that is provided by inputting into the Planning process and influencing private sector providers.

2. To work with registered providers to achieve a balance between traditional social rented properties and new business which enables them to develop other types of homes, such as affordable rent, market rent, homes for sale.

3. To contribute to the implementation of the council's forthcoming Asset Management strategy.

Relevant Position Statements

- Empty Homes
- Conversions to Affordable Rent
- Affordable Housing Mix
- Residential/Commercial
- Self-build
- Community Engagement
- Council's own assets
- Housing growth
- Owner-occupied housing.

Theme 2: Improving the condition and management of existing housing

Relevant issues:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Summary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A higher than average amount of pre-1919 built homes. ➤ A higher percentage of homes built in the inter-war years. ➤ Hazards of excess cold, trips and falls. ➤ Strong demand for disabled adaptations ➤ A growing private rented sector ➤ Issues with conditions, overcrowding and management of homes ➤ Uneven concentrations of service recipients and enforcement action among privately owned housing in Watford. ➤ Partial knowledge of services among home owners, landlords and tenants. ➤ The Housing Act 2004 requires that local authorities retain a good level of knowledge about housing stock in their area. |
|----------------|---|

Priorities

1. To revise the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy (which includes grants and loan assistance) to make homes decent and adapt them for disabled persons
2. To increase the awareness of letting agents, private landlords and tenants regarding acceptable standards, responsibilities and remedies in order to empower them to make informed choices.
3. To improve the condition of the housing stock to enable the provision of safe, sustainable, healthy and well-maintained homes.
4. Renew cross-service procedures to improve the customer experience and effectiveness of casework on:-
 - Overcrowding
 - Illegal or retaliatory eviction of harassment.
5. To renew the evidence base through an assessment of Watford's housing stock which samples a range of homes and indicates the issues with the stock we need to address e.g. energy efficiency.

Relevant Policy Statements

- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- Private rented sector and working with landlords.

Theme 3: Support to client groups

Relevant issues:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Summary | ➤ There are competing housing needs. There has been a significant increase in the number of single person households, yet also a big increase in the number of children |
|----------------|---|

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>aged under four years old.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Demand for affordable housing exceeds supply. Alternative to traditional affordable housing options are not extensively promoted. ➤ There is demand for housing from higher paid professionals and lower paid employees of the service industry. ➤ Watford residents earn more than Watford employees. ➤ Housing development numbers have exceeded their target, but homelessness is still increasing due to issues. |
|--|---|

| |
|---|
| <p>Priorities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To carry out an annual review of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2. To implement and monitor a revised Housing Nominations Policy and a Private Sector Discharge Policy, including management of customer expectations, 3. To engage with private landlords with the aim of increasing the availability of privately rented homes for households in housing need. 4. To devise plans to increase the supply of wheelchair accessible temporary accommodation for homeless households. 5. Older people . to support activity to improve registered provider sheltered housing to become Flexicare accommodation which will meet the current and future needs of Watford residents. |
|---|

Relevant Policy Statements

- Older people
- Adaptations
- Housing nominations
- Procurements and Commissioning
- Homelessness (supporting beyond statutory duties)
- Temporary accommodation

- Supported housing.

Theme 4: Key locations

Relevant issues:

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Summary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are substantial variations between wards in Watford. The following are brief profiles of housing characteristics in each ward. • Overcrowding is concentrated particularly in Central, Vicarage and Holywell wards. • The pipeline of affordable housing will be concentrated mainly in a small number of Special Policy areas including the Watford Health Campus (Vicarage and Holywell wards), Watford Junction (Central ward) and Ascot Road (Holywell ward). • Particular types of energy inefficient housing stock are concentrated in certain wards. • The street environment in certain neighbourhoods have been identified as in need of multi-agency improvement action. |
|----------------|--|

Priorities

1. To support the delivery of affordable housing in the Special Policy Areas.
2. To implement targeted initiatives such as Street Improvement Projects which tackle a range of issues in specific areas, such as property conditions, rubbish outside, community safety concerns, through a multi-agency approach.

Relevant Policy Statements

- Empty homes
- Private Rented Sector and working with landlords
- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- Community Engagement

Theme 5: Wellbeing, economy and health

Relevant issues:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Summary | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The quality of the home has a substantial impact on health; a warm, dry and secure home is associated with better health. In addition to basic housing requirements, other factors that help to improve well-being include the neighbourhood, security of tenure and modifications for those with disabilities.• Housing-related hazards that increase the risk of illness include damp, mould, excess cold and structural defects that increase the risk of an accident (such as poor lighting, or lack of stair handrails).• The elderly are particularly at risk of health problems relating to accidents and excess cold in the home. |
|----------------|---|

| |
|---|
| Priorities <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Undertake housing related activity in line with health and well-being priorities for the borough, such as achieving safe and healthy homes+. This will refer to the new Code for Sustainable Homes whose measures of sustainability include Health and Wellbeing.2. Undertake housing related activity to support economic growth in Watford in consultation with Watford's business community. |
|---|

Relevant Policy Statements

- Older people
- Residential/Commercial

Theme 6: Communication

Relevant issues:

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Summary | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ In late 2013 information on Social Media usage in the United Kingdom was as follows:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 84.1% of the U.K. population is now on-line. |
|----------------|--|

| | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48% of adults in the United Kingdom used a social network in 2012, rising to 87% among 18-24 years olds. ➤ Watford Borough Council has an ambitious programme of economic and housing growth which needs to be communicated effectively through successful community engagement. ➤ Housing-related policies are set to change and require intensive communication in order to achieve their objectives. ➤ Watford has a younger than average population. Young people aged under 35 are disproportionately highly represented among the customer base of the Housing Team. There are now very distinct differences between age groups in terms of the communication methods which are used. ➤ Watford's older older+person age group, i.e. those aged 75+, remains steady in numbers. This older age group is likely to prefer more traditional methods of communication. |
|--|---|

| |
|---|
| <p>Priorities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To develop a co-ordinated communications strategy for housing-related issues in Watford to achieve the following:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convey a range of messages, such expectations on the availability of affordable housing for rent, on a range of housing options, on sources of housing-related assistance, on housing-related support services, and to improve perceptions of a range of housing options. • To communicate information to meet the requirements, expectations and aspirations of a range of ages and demographic groups, and to communicate with more %difficult to reach+groups such as young people, vulnerable people. • To be receptive to existing and new technological options for communications 2. To devise an approach to community engagement on housing growth issues in partnership with registered providers. |
|---|

| |
|---|
| <p>Relevant Policy Statements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Growth • Community Engagement |
|---|

- Procurement and Commissioning

Areas to monitor where intervention is less achievable

1. Levels of demand from people wanting to move and stay in Watford, including from London and other Hertfordshire local authorities.
2. The desire of investors to buy and rent out property. Watford residential property usually provides a good return on an investment.
3. Competition in the housing market from high income working people.
4. Decreased revenue funding for supported housing.

