

# **Private Sector Housing Strategy**

## **2007-2011**

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This strategy sets out the Council's approach to dealing with existing private sector housing.

The strategy is focused on four Key Themes. These encompass the key issues in private sector housing throughout the city.

- **Meeting the Decent Home Standard and increasing the quality, supply and choice of housing.**
  - **Tackling poor neighbourhood management standards.**
  - **Targeting resources strategically and at areas of greatest need.**
  - **Attracting funding to enable the delivery of sustainable neighbourhoods.**
- 1.2 A key driver in the development of this strategy is the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance), (England and Wales) Order 2002, which gave the Council flexibility in delivering housing renewal.

The Private Sector Housing Strategy should also be read in the context of the City of Sunderland Housing Strategy 2006 to 2011. The priorities and objectives of which are detailed in the action plan.

**Sunderland's private housing sector is made up of approximately 89,520 owner-occupied and privately rented**

dwellings, from a total stock of 123,982. The private sector is very diverse, containing both poor quality, normally lower value housing stock and higher value, higher specification properties. While the majority of the sector is maintained and managed to a high standard, some dwellings suffer some of the worst housing conditions in the city and therefore the Council aims to address these issues. This Private Sector Housing Strategy, (PSHS) will enable the Council to focus activity on the issues leading to the decline of the housing stock.

- 1.3 The PSHS will also assist the Council in developing local plans to address local needs which will in turn support area regeneration and market renewal initiatives in areas which require intervention to remain or become sustainable and desirable places to live.

- 1.4 The PSHS should be read in conjunction with the associated Action Plan.

## 2. National Context

- 2.1 Communities and Local Government, (CLG) is the Government department responsible for producing housing policy and in February 2003 published the Sustainable Communities Plan, (SCP). This details how Councils should approach creating sustainable communities and outlines the importance of affordability, choice and accessibility of housing. In order to fulfil this agenda central government established various departments, units and organisations that support regeneration in meeting local housing needs, these include Regional Housing Boards, English Partnerships, New Deal for Communities Programmes, Single Regeneration Programmes, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, (NRF) Programme and the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit.

### 2.2 Equalities And Diversity

The Race Relations Act (1976), as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone

on grounds of race, colour, nationality (including citizenship), or ethnic or national origin. The amended Act also imposes positive duties on many public authorities to promote racial equality. It applies to: jobs; training; housing; education; the provision of goods, facilities and services. It is also unlawful for public bodies to discriminate while carrying out any of their functions.

The amended Act imposes a positive duty on all major public bodies to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations.

This PSHS recognises that the city has a large and diverse population whose needs differ greatly. The Council aim to treat all communities and service users fairly and equally in order to assist them in meeting their needs.

The Council will continue to assess, update and address the needs of vulnerable people and minority groups across the city through research and policy development.

This strategy will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure that it reflects the diversity of Sunderland's population appropriately.

This strategy encompasses all private sector housing city-wide, however due to the nature of housing decline, Council intervention will be more prevalent in neighbourhoods which suffer the worse deprivation and towards vulnerable people and minority groups.

### 3. Local Context

3.1 As Strategic Housing Authority the Council has a responsibility to ensure that all households have access to suitable accommodation that meets their individual housing needs, this includes persons in housing need and vulnerable households.

3.2 Locally the Council work with other organisations, bodies and partners and consider various agendas and strategies to deliver the best services and programmes. Some of these organisations are: -

- **Sunderland's Strategic Housing Partnership, (SHP)** brings together a wide range of organisations from across the public, private and voluntary sectors to take up the Housing role on behalf of the City of Sunderland Partnership.
- The **Sunderland Voluntary Landlord's Accreditation Scheme** has been in operation since April 2003 and as of July 2007 has a membership of 203 landlords, accounting for approximately 3,284 bed spaces across 995 properties.
- **Registered Social Landlord's Forum** - The RSL Forum is a well-supported mechanism of joint working between RSL's and the city Council. Relevant housing issues are raised facilitating discussion
- **Home Builder's Forum** – The forum is the coming together of high profile house builders and developers and Sunderland Council. This allows all parties to discuss the issues affecting private house building across the city in a structured and open forum.

### 4. City Council Objectives

- 4.1 Sunderland City Council's strategy for private sector housing is integrally linked to and driven locally by the **Sunderland Strategy**, produced by the Local Strategic Partnership, (LSP) and the overall **Housing Strategy 2006-2011**.
- 4.2 The LSP represents many of the key agencies operating in the city including colleges, the press and health services as well as the Police and the Council. The **Sunderland Strategy** shares the three key themes of Quality, Choice and Needs.

The Council's Housing Strategy 2006-2011 provides a strategic platform reflecting Council priorities for housing throughout those

five years. The 10 Priorities of the Housing Strategy 2006-2011 are detailed in the Action Plan.

The main aims of the strategy are:

- Improved choice of type, location and price to meet 21st Century aspirations and demands, which will reverse the trend of outward migration.
- Improved quality and standards of housing in well-managed sustainable communities.
- Accommodation and support appropriate to the needs of Sunderland's large and diverse population.

4.3 The **Community Cohesion Agenda** promotes a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities, the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances that are appreciated and positively valued.

4.4 The approach taken in tackling **Anti Social Behaviour** is a partnership one involving joint working between a range of agencies, including the Anti-social Behaviour Delivery Group, the Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving Meetings (LMAP), Safer Estates Agreements and the Anti-Social Behaviour Order Protocol.

## 5. Regional Approach to Housing Policy

5.1 Regionally, the most important elements underpinning housing policy are encompassed in the Regional Housing Strategy. Produced by the North East Housing Board (NEHB) this strategy directs local authorities on housing policy, sub-regional objectives and spending by promoting the delivery of the four objectives of the Regional Housing Strategy (RHS). These are to:

- **Rejuvenate the housing stock** to meet 21st Century aspirations, replacing market failure with high quality housing in the right locations to help create successful, cohesive and sustainable communities.
- Ensure the **type and mix of new housing provides choice**, supports economic growth and meets housing needs and demand. This will reflect the diversity of urban and rural communities and the needs for affordable, family and prestige housing.
- Secure the **improvement and maintenance of existing housing** so that it meets required standards, investing in sustainable neighborhoods.
- Promote good management and targeted housing investment to address **specific community and social needs**, including an ageing population and the needs of minority communities. This will be integrated with the Supporting People programme and promote greater community involvement.

## 6. Sub-regional partnership working

- 6.1 The Tyne and Wear Strategic Housing Partnership is the sub-regional group which links the five local authorities and coordinates housing work throughout the sub-region. It provides leadership, policy guidance and makes key decisions ensuring effective partnership working on housing related issues across organisations from the sub-region.
- 6.2 Sub-regional funding is delivered by the Single Housing Investment Pot (SHIP), which is distributed to the various housing partnerships and demonstrates central government's commitment to cross-boundary working.

- The Tyne and Wear Strategic Housing Partnership was allocated £11.3m discretionary funding across 2004-06, (SHIP1) and a total allocation of £19.3m across 2006-08, (SHIP2). This is aimed at delivering the objectives identified in the RHS.
- The T&W partnership has recently completed development of a strong Sub-Regional Housing Strategy, which details the financial requirements across 2008-2011, (SHIP3). This will enable and assist Councils to deliver housing programmes that deliver the objectives of the updated RHS, post April 2008

## **7. Housing Markets**

- 7.1 Local authorities cannot control housing markets. However central Government direction in recent years is that local authorities should monitor, recognise and acknowledge housing market trends as part of their strategic housing and planning roles. This will enable local authorities to develop relevant, well informed housing strategies, policies and interventions that target negative issues such as housing decline, low demand and market failure.
- 7.2 The Housing Market differs throughout the country, the North East region and the Tyne and Wear sub-region. There are various reasons why housing markets differ, these can be linked to socio-economic factors, such as education, employment and crime as well as an area's perception to the public and its transport links.
- 7.3 It has been long portrayed that high demand and under supply are common trends in the south of England, (making it on average the most expensive part of the country to secure property), and issues surrounding low-demand, oversupply and housing decline are portrayed in the north. These northern trends are evident in parts of the northeast region as a whole and in Sunderland
- 7.4 To understand the Local Housing Market, the Council now examine and monitor housing markets across Sunderland and other related areas. This provides valuable information enabling the identification of housing decline and areas for targeted intervention. The housing market is very diverse with property values and growth fluctuating significantly across the city.
- 7.5 Although some negative trends are evident in parts of the city, evidence highlights that overall, all areas of Sunderland have seen increases in property prices since 2001 which in some areas have been significant. The major increases have taken effect between 2001 and 2004 with the trend slowing in the most recent 18 months.
- 7.6 Property values have risen similarly across all areas of the city, although some areas have increased more than others. The monitoring systems examine markets at neighbourhood level, highlighting small pockets of housing decline to enable further monitoring and targeted intervention. It is the Councils aim to tackle poor quality housing and enable the sustainability of all communities city-wide.

## **8. Affordable Housing**

- 8.1 The issue of affordable housing supply affects most regions of the country; however it is more acute in some regions. A lack of affordable housing and an imbalance of alternative housing at local levels can result in an increase in demand and hence increased property values highlighting more the issue of affordability.
- 8.2 Sunderland has seen property values increase by 112.2% across the past five years, which was in line with national and regional trends. This has ensured that Sunderland retains a strong private housing market although has highlighted the affordability issue locally.
- 8.3 Investor buying of properties in the city, has also increased, a trend which anecdotal evidence suggests has helped fuel the increase in property prices, pricing more local people out of the housing market.
- 8.4 The Council will investigate the issue of affordable housing supply throughout the city within a Local Housing Market Assessment that commenced in July 2007.

## 9. Performance & Monitoring

- 9.1 The Council's performance in respect of Private Housing is monitored both internally and externally:
  - **Best Value Performance Indicators, (BVPI's)** monitor a Council's performance towards specified national targets. The Council take the issue very seriously and report performance to the Audit Commission on a yearly basis.

- **Corporate Improvement Objectives** within the Housing Service monitor the time it takes to deal with requests and complaints which are important to the Housing Service. These measure the performance of the team and highlight how the service takes seriously customer satisfaction. The target of 100% is set as a 'service standard' to ensure optimum service delivery to the customer.
- **Key Lines of Enquiry, (KLOEs)** represent sets of questions and statements around either service or judgement specific issues which provide consistent criteria for assessing and measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of housing services. These KLOEs are designed to provide inspectors, inspected bodies and others with a framework through which to view and assess services. In order to ensure this strategy was developed and is delivered in line with governments KLOE's the Council has benchmarked this strategy against the criteria.

## 10. Delivering on The Four Key Themes

### 10.1 Key Theme 1 – To meet the Decent Home Standard and increase the quality, supply and choice of housing.

The **Decent Homes Standard, (DHS)** was set by Central Government in 2002 to improve standards in both the social and private rented sectors across the country. To comply local authorities are required to ensure that 70% of properties accommodating vulnerable households in the private sector meet the standard by 2010 and 75% by 2020. The Council benchmark its position on this target via the Private Sector Stock Condition Surveys. To meet the DHS each home should, be free of Category 1 hazards and serious disrepair, have

reasonably modern facilities and services and provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

10.2 Programmes and mechanisms supporting this aim are:

### **The Home Improvement Agency**

The Home Improvement Agency, (HIA) is the locally based agency that assists homeowners and private sector tenants who are older, disabled or on low incomes to repair, improve, maintain and/or adapt their homes. It provides a customer focused approach providing valuable services which tackle poor and unsuitable housing. The HIA enables customers to remain in their own home, becoming or remaining safe, secure and independent. The HIA will deliver the following programmes:

#### **Sunderland Energy Efficiency Programme 2006-08 (SEEP)**

SEEP builds upon the Council's excellent work in respect of tackling fuel poverty and reducing domestic energy use throughout the city. The programme provides householders with energy saving measures such as cavity wall and loft insulation at either reduced cost or in some cases no cost.

The Council envisage that the programme will deliver 4,800 measures in two years, and provide an excellent platform with which to tackle fuel poverty within the most vulnerable groups in the city.

### **Financial Assistance Programme**

Financial assistance can be offered by the Council to enable homeowners to maintain their homes and properties. The benchmark for evaluating property condition is the Decent Homes Standard.

Although it is an owner's responsibility to maintain their own home the Council can offer assistance to vulnerable groups and persons who do not have the necessary resources.

The vehicle for this is the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance), (England and Wales) Order 2002 on housing renewal giving the Council greater flexibility when determining how financial assistance may be provided to support its housing renewal objectives.

### **Moving from Grants to Loans**

Whilst in many ways grant investment has led to improved housing conditions for a number of households and helped to remove the worst concentrations of unfitness, the grant-led approach has a number of downsides: -

- An expectation amongst homeowners regards the availability of ongoing public sector support to address essential maintenance and repairs;
- The creation of disincentives for owners to undertake essential repairs and maintenance, (transfer of responsibility to the public sector);
- The failure of programmes to act as catalysts for wider investment, a key feature of the original thinking behind urban renewal programmes.

The Home Assistance Regulatory Reform Order, (RRO) provides much more flexible and wide ranging powers for Councils to deal with private sector housing in poor condition. Enabling vulnerable owners to finance investment through loans in addition to grant aid has been the response from a number of Local Authorities.

Various types of loans may be available such as equity loans for home improvement and relocation, (linked to home swap and homesteading), capital and interest repayment loans and small-unsecured loans for home improvement. We are reviewing our Financial Assistance Policy to ensure



that it reflects the changing environment and to meet the Government's drive to move from grants to loans.

We intend to explore the potential of all of these products and a key action for this strategy will be to develop our knowledge and understanding of loans and develop loan products. This will be very much in line with Government thinking. The Government is keen to see that the ratio of loans to grants increases. It is important therefore that we keep abreast of this. Whilst there is massive potential for the use of loans in Sunderland, there is also potential to work with other authorities in the region and develop a consistent regional based approach to loans.

It is intended that the revised Financial Assistance Policy will be in place for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008.

### **Disabled Facilities Grants**

The Council delivers a programme of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), which meets the Council's statutory obligations to provide home alterations for disabled people. This programme provides alterations and equipment such as stair lifts, access ramps, bathing facilities and in extreme cases, may provide extensions to provide bedroom and bathroom facilities.

The programme increases a resident's ability to remain independent in their home. This leads to a greater housing choice, more suitable types of accommodation and ultimately increased neighbourhood stability.

Following an assessment of need by an occupational therapist, (in-line with the Council eligibility criteria) grants are targeted towards those who need assistance the most. This supports the government's agenda contained in, the White Paper 'Our Health, Our Care, Our Say' and links with government targets to reduce the number of people moving into residential care.

### **Other maintenance programmes**

The Council has established a 'handypersons' service and is exploring other means of assistance, with the focus particularly on older persons to assist them to continue to live independently in their own home.

### **Empty Property Strategy & Actions**

Empty Properties blight many neighbourhoods across our city and are detrimental to the lives of those who live near them. The Council adopted an Empty Property Strategy in October 2003, (currently being reviewed and updated) which aims to tackle the problems associated with 'one off' empty properties and maximise the number which are returned to sustainable long-term occupation.

The main aims of the strategy are to

- Monitor the numbers of empty homes and research the reasons and trends why they are vacant
- Determine those areas of the city which have sustainability issues with regard to housing stock in the private sector
- Reduce the number of long-term empty properties and reduce the detrimental effects on local communities
- Reduce arson, crime and anti-social behaviour targeted at empty properties
- Reduce the burden and costs of empty properties to owners and communities
- Help landlords and owners realise the full potential of their properties
- Encourage the regeneration of declining areas and communities
- Assist in delivering the aims of the PSHS 2007-2011

In order to tackle the numbers of empty properties the strategy outlines two approaches. In the first instance the Council will attempt to broker an agreement with the owner or landlord to return the property to occupation. If an owner can do this independently

the Council will monitor the situation until occupation is confirmed. If an owner cannot facilitate occupation the Council can offer assistance, such as recommending a suitable lettings agent, offering general and local advice or working in partnership, via the Self-Accredited Landlords Scheme.

If an owner refuses to progress the property to occupation, (and there are grounds for use), the Council can invoke one of the following powers to ensure occupation is achieved:

A **Compulsory Purchase Order, (CPO)** allows the Council to purchase a property and dispose of as it sees fit e.g. by resale to a new owner who will undertake refurbishment and facilitate sustainable occupation.

Through **Enforced Sale Procedure** the Council can 'forcibly' sell a privately owned property. It can be utilised on any property on which there is an outstanding debt owed to the Council by the owner. The property would be disposed of in the same manner as following a CPO. These powers have facilitated the re-occupation of 3 long-term empty properties since 2003.

**Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO's)** tackle problematic, derelict and neglected properties. An EDMO allows the Council to intervene where an owner has neglected their property and has left it empty for longer than six months.

Since its implementation in April 2003 and up to the end of March 2007 the Empty Property Strategy has lead to the demolition or occupation of 526 empty properties, many of which had been empty long-term and were blighting the locality. Of the 526, 4 dwellings alone were collectively empty for over 48 years prior to new life being breathed into them. More information on empty property work is detailed in the full empty property strategy.

## **Clearance Programme**

The Council is empowered to declare a clearance area in accordance with the Housing Act 2004 but before any such action is decided the findings of a Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment (NRA) will be considered.

## **10.3 Key Theme 2 - Tackling poor neighbourhood management standards**

The Council take very seriously the issue of anti-social behaviour and management standards within the private sector. The Neighbourhood Relations Team engages landlords to assist them to deal with poor tenants and improves the overall standard of property management. This is a vital part of balancing neighbourhoods and ensuring they become and remain sustainable.

10.4 Programmes and mechanisms supporting this aim are:

## **Neighbourhood Relations**

The Neighbourhood Relations Team was established in March 2004 and consists of the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, the Accreditation and Licensing Co-ordinator and the management of the quarterly held Landlord's Forum.

The team has a variety of roles including the following:

- Supporting witnesses and the victims of crime and anti-social behaviour across the city.
- Identifying, recruiting and supporting private landlords.
- Offering housing and support to vulnerable individuals and families.
- Providing support to house anti-social families threatened with homelessness.
- Developing and implementing Community Safety Initiatives in order to raise awareness among residents.

- Developing multi-agency problem solving approach to anti-social behaviour.
- Provision of a mediation service.
- Provision of dedicated officers for the Hendon area.
- Target Hardening Schemes

The Council are also intending to launch a pilot Accredited Tenants' Scheme.

Within Renewal Areas, Priority Neighbourhoods or other localities where a high degree of property crime or neighbourhood anti-social behaviour can be demonstrated, target-hardening improvements may be considered for financial assistance. These may be considered on the basis of Minor Works Grants to individual properties or as neighbourhood schemes on a contract basis. Funding may be targeted solely from the Housing Renewal budget or as match funding in conjunction with other crime prevention initiatives.

### **Sunderland Voluntary Landlords' Accreditation Scheme**

Building upon the success of the Ford and Pallion Private Landlords' Agreement, the city-wide Voluntary Landlords' Accreditation Scheme was implemented across the city in April 2003 and is a model for partnership working between the council and private landlords. The partnership aims to ensure that private rented homes are managed effectively both in terms of property standards and the behaviour of tenants, giving decent landlords the 'market edge'.

The Landlords' Forum, provides the opportunity for landlords to discuss a range of issues with council departments and external agencies. Some of these issues have resulted in new working methods being adopted to the benefit of all parties.

### **Regulation of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's)**

The Council recognise that HMO accommodation is specialised and welcomed the Government's approach to HMO regulation. Government guidance splits HMO's into two categories, those which require a licence – 'licensable' and those which do not – 'non-licensable'.

The Council, has established a mandatory HMO licensing scheme which will run for five years. Our aim is to ensure that all 'licensable' HMO's are licensed allowing landlords to let the properties appropriately.

A licence will only be issued by the Council following a full inspection of the HMO. It is estimated that there are 300 licensable HMO's in the city. These will be inspected in order to provide a comprehensive and fair service to all landlords and tenants associated with HMO's.

Following the issue of a licence a rolling programme will be implemented to check that in all HMO's the necessary standards are continually maintained. The Council also aims to seek out and deal with all licensable HMO's that do not comply with the standards and attempt to operate without a licence.

There are also over 1,000 non-licensable HMO's in the city. A further programme is in place to check upon their standards.

### **Selective Licensing**

The Housing Act 2004 gave discretionary powers to Councils to introduce Selective Licensing Schemes relating to private sector properties that are situated in areas of low demand and/or where there is persistent anti-social behaviour and where the private landlords involved refuse to take the necessary action to address the problems.

The Council intends to introduce Selective Licensing in relevant areas when other remedies fail to tackle the problems, and where housing decline and increased deprivation remain prevalent.

### **Pre-formal Enforcement Action**

In dealing with requests for service or unsatisfactory housing conditions identified by other means the first option is for officers to take an informative and advisory approach to owners, tenants and landlords alike and every effort will be made to resolve matters by informal means.

Where a category 1 hazard is found the Council have a duty to take one of a variety of actions depending on the severity of the hazard.

Where a category 2 hazard is present the Council may take action. Usually by serving a hazard awareness notice on the owner or landlord.

The Council is allowed to take immediate formal enforcement action where this is considered necessary and appropriate in the light of serious situations or circumstances.

### **Formal Enforcement Action**

When considering formal action the Housing Renewal Team will need to determine the most appropriate enforcement option and the strength of the evidence for taking action. Consideration will also be taken of the public interest and the rights of individuals.

Where a dwelling has been identified as having category 1 or 2 hazards the Council must determine the most satisfactory course of action from a range of options:

- Improvement - to force an owner to maintain or make safe a property.
- Prohibition Order - consideration is given to the blight effect of properties where a Prohibition order prohibits the use of a dwelling and the possibility of the premises being restored into sustainable use.

- Demolition.
- Area based action - is the problem restricted to an individual property or is a wider area approach necessary?
- Compulsory Purchase Order or Enforced Sale Procedure – as described in the empty property section.

### **10.5 Key Theme 3 - Targeting resources strategically and at areas of greatest need**

Pockets of neighbourhood decline and market failure can blight the local housing skyline. The Council identify such areas of housing through surveys and neighbourhoods assessments. These have allowed the Council to develop Renewal Areas and Action Areas that will transform declining housing into sustainable modern places to live. Resources for such area-based work are limited and are therefore targeted at the areas in greatest need.

10.6 Programmes and mechanisms supporting this aim are:

#### **Renewal Area Programme**

The aim of the Area Renewal Service is to work with communities to revitalise them and turn them into sustainable neighbourhoods. The neighbourhoods concerned are selected following examination of relevant studies.

The Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2002 identified areas of housing in the city where the Council's intervention was seen as critical to arresting housing decline. The Council earmarked five neighbourhoods for NRA studies and commissioned consultants to undertake the work in 2003. In consideration of the findings of the NRAs, the Council recommended that wider studies on two areas of housing at Hetton Downs and Castletown be undertaken with a view to implementing housing-led regeneration programmes.

The renewal service has since appointed Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners, (NLP) to produce a Regeneration Masterplan in Castletown and an Area Action Plan for Hetton. These will reflect the needs and aspirations of the local communities and key stakeholders of the area.

Together with colleagues in Property Services and the Housing Renewal Team, private sector houses in Castletown and Hetton have been voluntarily acquired and cleared in line with the findings of the NRA. A part of the renewal programme is to offer occupiers of the affected streets, support to relocate into a more sustainable property. The area renewal service works closely with Registered Social Landlords and the Council's Homeless and Advice Team to deliver re-housing requirements through nominations and also relocation loans may be offered to support purchase of a viable alternative home.

The service works with residents, ward members, community groups and key stakeholders to ensure optimum involvement in the development of regeneration plans.

In addition to the renewal areas identified in 2003, work with the New Deal for Communities programme (NDC) in the east end and Hendon areas of the city has highlighted that an area of housing within Central Hendon is suffering extreme market failure. To this end the Council and NDC have initiated a Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment (NRA) of the housing stock in the Central Hendon area. Consult CIH were appointed to undertake the NRA and an associated regeneration action plan. This is the first step in determining the future for the housing and regeneration of the wider NDC area.

#### **10.7 Key Theme 4 – Attracting funding to enable the delivery of sustainable neighbourhoods**

The success of Council intervention hinges on various elements. The Council is aware that early intervention and targeting resources strategically to the areas of greatest need are elements that can lead to increased sustainability of a neighbourhood. These elements are given high priority when implementing plans and programmes in the worst areas of housing decline and deprivation. Thus giving the intervention plans the greatest chance of success.

To deliver an overall private sector that is the best for the city the Council are aware that funding is key. Therefore the Council work together with partners, such as the Regional Housing Board and English Partnerships to ensure the maximum funding for housing renewal and other programmes is brought into the city.

#### **10.8 Programmes and mechanisms supporting this aim are:**

##### **Partnership Working**

The Council carries out joint working with a wide range of agencies and individuals in order to effectively meet its aims and objectives. These include residents, councillors, contractors, the police and private landlords. The Council recognise that without this multi-agency co-operation, services would be less effective. Since the transfer of their housing stock Sunderland City Council have established excellent working partnerships with providers of accommodation such as the RSL's and Sunderland University

##### **Private Sector Homelessness Support Project**

The Private Sector Homelessness Support Project works with families threatened with homelessness many of whom would be deemed "intentionally" homeless due to behavioural issues, debt etc. The aim of the project is to provide good quality accommodation utilising properties owned by accredited private landlords and to provide a package of support to address relevant

issues to help sustain the tenancy and prevent repeat instances of homelessness.

The first families were placed on the project in April 2005 and 14 families have been housed to date. Of these only one has failed to maintain their tenancy. The project is evidence of the positive benefits that can develop from effective working relationships between the council and private landlords.

This project reached the finals of the Association of Public Sector Excellence Awards for 2006, which is a testament to the excellent work it has been doing and continues to do.

## **11. What the Council will do**

11.1 Over the period of this strategy the Council will:

- Licence all Houses of Multiple Occupation in line with mandatory licensing criteria;
- Continue to develop the Home Improvement Agency;
- Review its financial assistance package and make the move from grants to loans;
- Develop regeneration blueprints for areas of Hetton Downs and Castletown;
- Recruit a dedicated Home Energy Conservation Officer;
- Develop processes for selective Licensing and select areas for implementation;
- Embrace and implement the Government's 'Respect Agenda'
- Show a reduction in fear of crime among residents reporting anti-social behaviour
- Proactively respond to policy changes and ensure that our approach to private sector housing is continually evaluated