

Denbighshire County Council

Summary of the Progress report 2013-2018 Local Housing Strategy

May 2013

SUMMARY VERSION

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Commissioning of the Strategy

The Housing Team at Glyndŵr University was commissioned by Denbighshire County Council in January 2013 to undertake the research, consultation and final production of the new Local Housing Strategy for the period 2013-2018.

The Housing Team previously completed the Update of Housing Need, Demand and Affordability in the Local Housing Market Areas of Denbighshire for the Council in 2011 and continues to work with the Council on a number of other engagement and strategic projects. These include a lead coordinator role for Housing Team member Jane Richardson in the ongoing Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) project; exploring a common allocations policy for North East Wales. SARTH is itself an important example of the Council's commitment to work collaboratively with local and regional partners towards efficient future services.

The Local Housing Strategy process is an opportunity for the Council and the Housing Team to build on the detailed review of housing need and demand completed in the Update in order to provide the Council with a '... "living" and "relevant" document...' (Welsh Government, 2012b, pg.19) to use in evaluating the ongoing impact of economic uncertainties and ever growing demands on ever decreasing resources. Equally it is also important to use the process and the Strategy to celebrate achievements since the last Strategy in 2007 and the potential for future successes available through targeted interventions and inclusive partnerships with the residents and, public and private sector providers in the County.

The Task set by the Council

The Council's Housing & Community Development team have set the Housing Team the challenge of producing an 'innovative' Strategy able to '...respond to challenges of the dynamic environment as public expenditure reduces and alternative ways of funding housing projects are needed.' (Denbighshire CC, January 2013)

The Strategy must reflect the need for the Housing & Community Development team to be more business orientated, as reflected in its recent restructuring, as well as having a greater focus on the customer and be more outcome-based.

To assist in this the Strategy is to have a focused and reduced number of outcomes, a process reflected in the 2007 Strategy which actively reduced the number of strategic objectives from the 2004 Strategy. The new Strategy will consist of 3 themes with specific objectives and outcomes detailed for each.

The Strategy is to be clearly evidence based and placed in a national, regional and local context where the objectives and outcomes set can be clearly aligned with one or all of these geographic areas with regards to, for example, policy, best practice, and significant pressures; be they economic, social, based on assessments of housing need and demand etc.

Finally the Strategy is to be no more than 25-30 pages long in order to make the document "living" and "relevant" for use not only by the Council but also by the key partners mentioned above. It is the intention of the Housing Team to produce a Strategy of this length that is usable and more importantly accessible and readable for anyone who wishes to use it and participate in housing services and delivery in the County through the next 5 years.

The document being presented to the Scrutiny Group is a much reduced summary of the full Progress Report. The full Progress Report sets out in detail the rationale for the initial selection of the Draft Strategy Vision, themes and objectives, as well as the next stages in the Strategy.

At this stage this Summary, and the full Progress Report, are only the starting point with regards to actually setting the Vision, themes and objectives.

It is the express wish of the Housing & Community Team at the Council (in line with the Local Housing Strategy guidance produced by the then Welsh Assembly Government in 2006), as well as the Housing Team at the University that the entire Strategy development process, beyond the research stage, is informed and developed with the involvement of the residents of the County as well as the key stakeholders likely to be affected by the final Strategy; yourselves as the Scrutiny Group of the Council included.

Moving forward from the Progress Report, there will be a set of public engagement days in late May and early June followed by targeted consultation with public and private sector groups. Access to ongoing opportunities to comment will be made through the Council's own forums, a dedicated Twitter account set up by the University for this Project; as well as the launch of an online survey that will also be made available in a paper format.

Furthermore an intensive round of consultation and assessment with the Housing & Community Team will be undertaken to seek clarification of the results of this initial stage and to formulate an Action Plan for the next 5 years.

A detailed Consultation plan is currently being agreed with the lead officer at the Council, building on the Consultation Statement presented earlier in 2013. A Consultation Briefing paper will be produced with this plan to assist Council staff who will be involved in the process with the Housing Team.

The Housing Team welcomes any comments and suggestions the Scrutiny Group has to make relating to the Progress Report. The vision, themes and objectives detailed in the following chapters are entirely open to adjustment and change based on the feedback received. We hope you are able to see the direct relationships between what is suggested in this Report and what national, regional and local documents indicate. The Housing Team recognises the invaluable worth of local expertise and will seek to be informed by this at all stages proceeding from the initial research.

Glyndŵr Housing Team

May 2013

1.1. **Introduction: The Situation in 2013.**

1.2. The 2011 Update produced by the Housing Team stated:

The ramifications of the 2008 Credit Crunch, the subsequent recession, and the 2010 CRS are still not clearly definable; though it is clear the contraction in the house building sector has occurred to varying degrees. Therefore, when considering changes to the drivers for economic development in the County, described in ... the Fordham Survey, the LDP deposit of 2009, and the Wales Spatial Plan Update of 2008, the only reliable statement to be made, is those drivers detailed as positive for the County may have become, or could be subject to pressures where their ongoing association may become a negative. (Glyndŵr, June 2011, pg.7)

Since the start of the Update project in 2010 and the completion of the research stage of this Local Housing Strategy in 2013, the truth of the statement that the ramifications of the Credit Crunch are ongoing and not clearly definable are obvious.

1.3. The Homes for Wales: A White Paper for Better Lives and Communities of 2012, which should progress to the presentation of legislation later in 2013, will form the national 'spine' of the Strategy with relative national documents such as the Welsh Government's 212 Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan for Growth and Jobs, and the 2013 Vibrant and Viable Place: New Regeneration Framework providing evidence and guidance on the formulation of County-specific objectives and outcomes.

1.4. Similarly, local plans produced by the Council including the 2011 Denbighshire: The Big Plan 2011-14, and the 2012 Corporate Plan 2012-17: An excellent council, close to the community along with the key national documents detailed will form the effective local 'thread' throughout the Strategy. In order to accomplish this, the Housing Team has adapted the methodology detailed in the 2006 Welsh Government Preparing Local Housing Strategies: Revised Guidance to Local Authorities in Wales from the Welsh Assembly Government. The LHS Guide states:

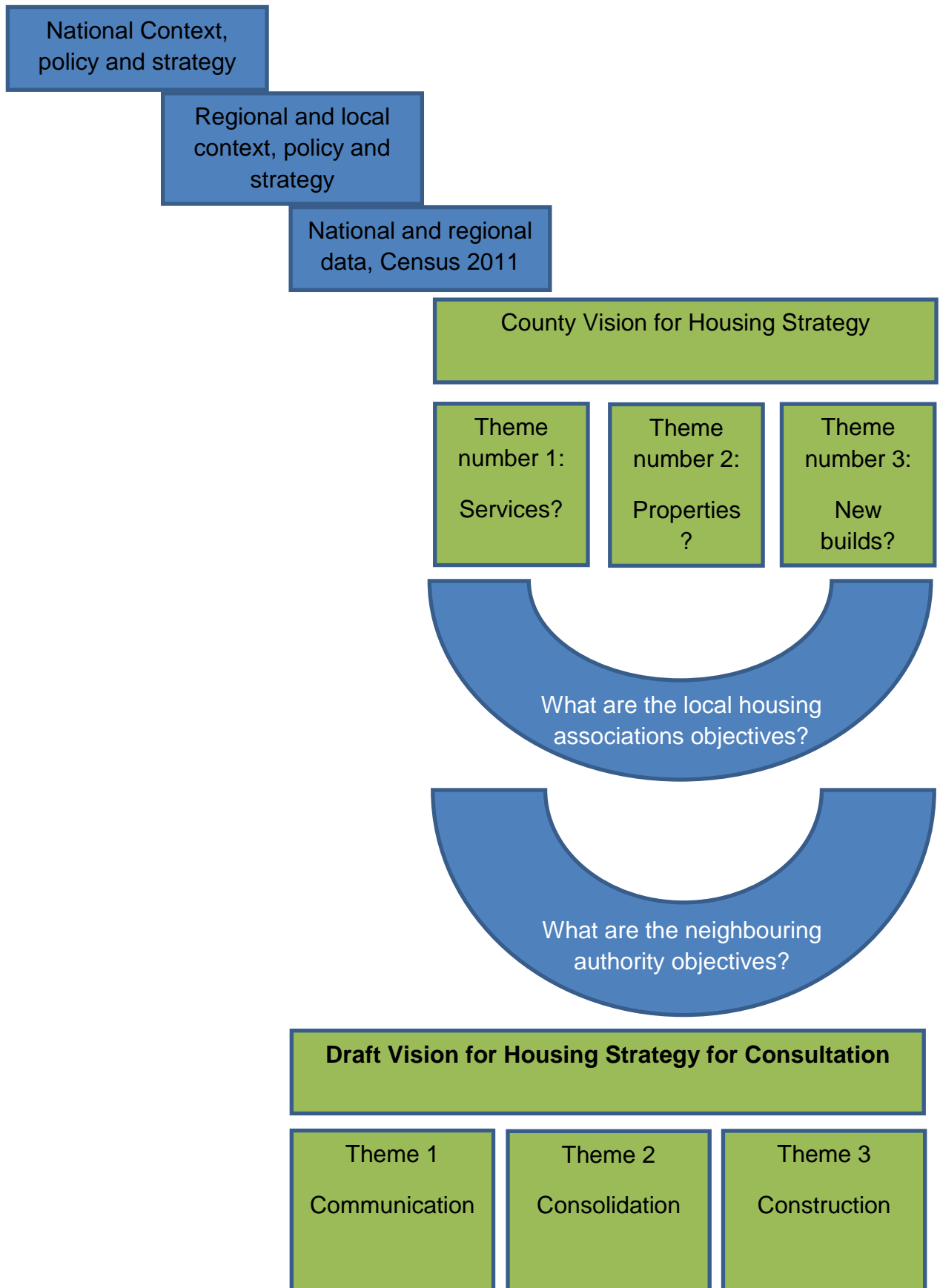
The primary purpose of a Local Housing Strategy is to articulate a locally agreed direction for addressing the housing requirements, problems and opportunities of an area, taking into account national policies and priorities set out in 'Better Homes for People in Wales' (Welsh Assembly Government, October 2006, pg.8)

And;

The Local Housing Strategy must be framed within the context of the overarching vision for the economic, environmental and social well-being of its area and inhabitants set out in the authority's Community Strategy, and be linked closely to other relevant local strategies and plans. (WAG, October 2006, pg.18)

- 1.5. While obviously the currency of the LHS Guide is somewhat out of date, it is this form of 'cascade approach' where local vision, themes and objectives are derived from national, then regional, then local drivers that the Housing Team has adopted. Fig.1 is a visual interpretation of this approach:

Fig.1: Draft model for scoping exercise leading to setting a contextualised County housing vision and strategic objectives.



1.6. **Visualisation in the document and the Vision statement for the strategy**

1.7. With regards to the second element of importance to the Draft Strategy, fig.1 is also an example of the type of visualisation of data the Housing Team is considering for the document in order to aid accessibility and meet the 25-30 page limit set in the brief. Furthermore it is our intention to use a different approach to highlighting key statements that has been used this far in this Report.

1.8. For example, in setting the County Vision for the Strategy, using the 'cascade' principle detailed in fig.2, the various national, regional and local stated visions would be listed. It may aid understanding and accessibility of they were presented thus:

National Context



A home is a vital part of people's lives. It affects their health and well being, quality of life, and opportunities available to them. (Welsh Assembly Government, April 2010, pg.4)

2010

Improving Lives and Communities: Homes in Wales (National Housing Strategy)

National Context



Our approach reflects our values of fairness, social justice, equality, and sustainable development. (Welsh Government, May 2012, pg.14)

2012

Homes for Wales: A White Paper for Better Lives and Communities

National Context



Our **vision** is that everybody in Wales should live in well-connected vibrant, viable and sustainable communities with a strong local economy and good quality of life. (Welsh Government, March 2013b, pg.4)

2013

Vibrant and Viable Places: New Regeneration Framework

Local Context



Everyone whether they buy or rent will be able to access good quality affordable housing which is more energy efficient and designed to meet their needs (Denbighshire CC, accessed 5th of May 2013)

2005

'Vision for Denbighshire 2025'

Local Context



Everyone will have the opportunity to access good quality, affordable housing designed to meet their needs now and in the future, whether they choose to rent or buy a home within Denbighshire. (Denbighshire CC, 2007, pg.7)

2007

Denbighshire Local Housing Strategy 2007-2012

- 1.9. From the perspective of presentation, the reader would see the various influencing comments, in this case relating to the Vision for the Strategy. So when the Draft Vision the Housing Team is proposing in the Strategy, the reader would be able to see clearly where the revised vision draws its inspiration:

Everyone in Denbighshire should be able to live in well connected, vibrant, and viable sustainable communities in homes that meet their ongoing needs of good health, wellbeing and quality of life; whether they rent or own their homes.

- 1.10. This Vision for the County is only a starting point and it, along with the three themes to follow, will be the subject of consultation over the next few months as the Draft Strategy evolves. The Housing Team welcomes any and all feedback relating to these initial suggestions.

Based on a similar approach, and explained in much greater detail in the full Progress Report this summary is based on, the initial proposed Draft Strategy themes are as follows:

Local Housing Strategy Theme 1:

Communication: To actively engage with everyone in the County to provide efficient and well informed services

2.1. Rationale

- 2.2. Each of the three thematic areas has been given a single word name, all of which start with a C (and translate into Welsh equivalents which all start with an A). The purpose in three single word themes is both simplicity and ease of recall. Visually, in materials published after the strategy process and in the final format of the document, the use of three single words, colour coded for readability, is a model successfully used by other organisations including Caerphilly County Borough Council's Strategy (using 'people, property, place') and in the use of colour coding by the Equality & Human Rights Commission.
- 2.3. Having three broad themes also allows for key partner organisations in the County, such as the Registered Social Landlords, to find a point of correlation to the three themes. For example **Communication** is about delivering engagement, efficient services, and gathering and distributing data and intelligence to best coordinate services in the County. This would match up to any set of values or objectives

provided by partners such as Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd. While Tai Clwyd are based in Denbigh, their area of operations extends beyond the County boundary and they cannot therefore be expected to adopt the Council's strategic themes directly. However examination of their 10 core objectives in their Business Plan 2011-2016 would see **Communication** and the objectives to be detailed match up with 6 of these with the other 4 correlating with the 2 other themes proposed for the draft Strategy; **Consolidation** and **Construction**.

- 2.4. There is a discussion to be had relating to using single word themes, even with an explanatory tag as shown above. They are meant to be bold, positive action terms but it may be that some people could struggle with a term such as **Consolidation**. This will be considered when the second theme is discussed in the following chapter.

2.5. As with the County Vision and the three themes, the objectives to follow are indicative of initial objectives for the draft. There is significantly more detail contained in the background research discussed at the start of this Progress Report that supports their selection; including relevant legislative contexts. However, as stated, in the interest of expedience at this early stage of the consultation process, a summary approach has been adopted. The Housing Team would welcome any comments and opinions relating to these, and any areas you believe should be added or amended.

2.6. **Objective 1: Broad and inclusive Engagement opportunities across all tenures**

2.7. **Objective 2: The 'See Through' Housing Service**

2.8. **Objective 3: Gathering and deploying relevant data and intelligence to become the County HUB for Housing.**

2.9. The **Communication** theme and the 3 objectives detailed are essentially cross-cutting objectives in that none of the objectives to follow under **Consolidation** and **Construction** can be successfully implemented without their successful deployment. Hence the listing of **Communication** as the first of the three themes.

Local Housing Strategy Theme 2:

Consolidation: To build on the successes achieved, and to protect and improve the assets Denbighshire already has.

3.1. **Rationale**

- 3.2. Of the three themes, the term **Consultation** may be the one where some people may wonder why this particular word has been used. It aims to be a positive term, stressing that in its communities, buildings, relationships, industries (tourism being an obvious one when considering locations across the County, along the coast and in Llangollen in particular). **Consolidation** suggests has a sense of action relating to enhancement and, even where relationships may be strained, or the physical regeneration is starting from a low base (long term empty properties for example) **Consolidation** suggests there is still something to build on.
- 3.3. Too often strategy documents, both from government and local authorities talk of 'creating' communities as if only the intervention of these powers means any viable community or development can exist. Using the term **Consolidation** suggests instead that the Council wishes to be an active partner, working through the engagement, efficient 'See Through' service, and well defined intelligence gathering and distributing HUB described under the first theme **Communication**.
- 3.4. Therefore, under **Consolidation**, the Council will seek to improve the existing housing stock by continuing to fulfil the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, bring Empty Homes back into use, and examine opportunities to improve energy efficiency across the tenures to tackle Fuel Poverty directly, and by this reduce overall pressures on stretched household budgets.
- 3.5. **Consolidation** will include an objective relating to building on the relationships already established with private sector landlords to ensure better relations and communication between the Council and all private landlords, private landlords and their tenants, and to use the objectives detailed in the **Communication** theme to act as a HUB for information improving the public image of this sector, whilst also acting as a BRIDGE relating to potential loan and grant opportunities.
- 3.6. Finally the **Consolidation** theme will build upon relationships with the service providers and customers of specialised services for hard to reach or vulnerable groups in the County, including those who require specialised services under the various programmes associated with those services, including Supporting People.
- 3.7. **Consolidation** in particular is an opportunity to celebrate the successes within the County, though this will not be the exclusive remit of this particular theme. As indicated at the start of this Progress Report, it is the intention of the Strategy to balance the positive and the negative to provide an accurate picture of what has been achieved and what is still yet to be done.

- 3.8. **Objective 1: Enhancing the Existing Housing Stock**
- 3.9. **Objective 2: Working with the Private Rented Sector**
- 3.10. **Objective 3: Ensuring effective Specialised Services**

Local Housing Strategy Theme 3:

Construction: To ensure new homes meeting the needs, demands and aspirations of Denbighshire's residents are built and help to contribute to the economic strength of the County

4.1. **Rationale**

- 4.2. The final theme is the most direct, **Construction**. Of the 3 themes it is also the one easiest to associate with a positive action and as with **Consolidation** it builds on the objectives detailed in the **Communication** theme. It also further develops those objectives detailed under the **Consolidation** theme with regards to the Council acting as a BRIDGE for loans and grants, and closer partnership work and the need for choice and adaptability.
- 4.3. The **Construction** theme will consider the need to build new homes directed by the housing needs and demand intelligence the Council has gathered and must capitalise on through the HUB model proposed in the **Communication** theme.
- 4.4. **Construction** will also provide an objective relating to ensuring the County maintains access to national regeneration funds as well as exploring new and innovative forms of funding and partnerships with both the public and private sector.
- 4.5. Finally the **Construction** theme will detail how the broader social and economic benefits of regeneration and new builds, as well as developments and improvements in all the tenures described in the **Consolidation** theme can be used to improve access to work, wellbeing, and quality of life in the County.
- 4.6. **Objective 1: Building new homes to meet need and demand**
- 4.7. **Objective 2: Seeking Innovations in investment and regeneration opportunities**
- 4.8. **Objective 3: Ensuring housing policy helps drive the local and regional economy.**