

Appendix B

Denbighshire County Council

Draft Strategy Framework

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1.1. **Draft Strategy Framework**

1.2. The Framework represents the research of National, Regional and Local policy and strategy that will underpin the full Strategy.

1.3. The Framework has been updated as a result of the consultation undertaken to date. This includes changes to the wording of the **Consolidation** and **Construction** theme's 6 objectives which were presented at the public consultation event on the 5th of June.

1.4. The Framework will now be **reduced** down into a more streamlined format that includes direct reference to the **Action Plan** currently being developed with Council staff based on this Framework and the consultation feedback.

1.5. Further feedback will continue to be sought as the draft develops.

Introduction: The Situation in 2013.

1.6. 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.

1.7. Nationally, the Homes for Wales: A White Paper for Better Lives and Communities of 2012 states:

We are in difficult times. Housing markets are depressed and new house building is at a low point. More affordable homes are being built but numbers have fallen as the impact of public sector cuts is felt. Some of the factors behind the changes, such as Welfare Reform, are outside our control. The underlying trend in homelessness is upwards, fuelled by rising costs of living, depressed earnings, and in some cases, people losing their jobs. The quality of existing homes is also cause for concern, with potential impacts on people's safety, and their health and well being, most worryingly for children. (Welsh Government, May 2012, pg.4)

1.8. While locally, the Council's Corporate Plan 2012-17: An excellent council, close to the community also described a similarly bleak picture:

The financial position faced by local authorities is currently very tough. Funding cuts by the UK Government in recent years mean that we have a lot less money to invest in services now than we have in the past. So far, we have been able to manage this situation by reducing our spending without any noticeable impact on the frontline services valued by our communities. (DCC, 2012, pg.2)

1.9. Any review of recent headlines in the national press and in those media outputs specific to the Housing Sector would indicate a poor outlook with additional complications for directing housing strategy going forward from

2013. A recent example includes a BBC News article stating an increasing number of households are borrowing money on credit cards, loans and overdrafts in order to eat (BBC News, May 2013), adding 'Food Poverty' to the list of depressing terms often used in the media; Fuel Poverty being the one most commonly seen and central to national debates for a number of years.

1.10. A key topic of consideration for many, in the Social housing and the private rented sector, as well as for owner occupiers, relate to the Welfare Reforms introduced by the Coalition Government. The Welsh Government commissioned a two part study to evaluate the impact of Welfare Reforms on Welsh communities and households, reporting in early 2012 and February 2013. They stated:

...the impact of the tax and benefit changes to be implemented by 2014–15 will mean that **on average households in Wales can expect to lose 4.1 per cent of their income (or £1,110 per year)**¹. This compares to a UK average loss of 3.8 per cent (or £1,170 per year).

...

Furthermore, **the poorest households with children are estimated to lose the largest proportion of their income** as a result of the tax and benefit changes. In particular, **non-working lone parents** and **workless couples with children** are expected to suffer a disproportionate financial hit. (Welsh Government, February 2012, pg.5)

Potential impacts on **housing** services relate to housing affordability, rent arrears, evictions and homelessness due to benefit cuts, direct and monthly payments, and sanctions, which may create budgeting problems. (Welsh Government, February 2013, pg.8)

Taking these forms of evaluations, and reports from the media and other sources such as the homelessness organisation Shelter Cymru, the Draft Strategy will develop a summary of the main pressures likely to impact on householders in the County from 2013-18. It will also detail the further impacts of changes on the operations of the Council itself relating to regulatory or financial developments.

¹ Emphasis in bold was in the original text.

- 1.11. From the perspective of seeking to produce an optimistic and forward-looking Strategy, the potential for pessimism arising from such uncertainty is not aided by even flagship Welsh Government projects such as the NewBuy scheme, set to help households purchase a new home and simultaneously encouraging house building, being dropped when their feasibility is challenged by the actions of the UK government.
- 1.12. However, 2012 did see the presentation of the Housing White Paper for Wales which, setting aside NewBuy, details a wide range of potential new powers and schemes to stimulate and strengthen the housing sector across all tenures; inclusive of general needs housing and more specialised accommodation for groups with particular social, physical or cultural needs. These may be challenging times but, with the Welsh Government attempting to direct resources and encourage innovations at the sector, to be detailed in the Strategy, these could also be exiting times for housing strategy and the Draft will seek to reflect a balance of the negative with the positive.
- 1.13. The White Paper, which should progress to the presentation of legislation later in 2013, contains a vision for housing delivery in Wales:

Renting a home from a social or private landlord will be seen as good options.

...

Co-operative housing will become a much more significant part of the housing system. People will receive more and better help to live independently, with additional support for our most vulnerable people, and not-for-profit organisations such as housing associations will be used to even greater effect. There will be even better, more integrated, policy and delivery by public services and joint action between organisations, with effective collaboration between local authorities. (WG, May 2012, pg.5)

- 1.14. The schemes and proposals in the White Paper will be detailed in the relevant sections of the Draft Strategy and, while some elements may not necessarily become law in the final version of the legislation, this Strategy will be written from the perspective that the Council cannot simply wait out the outcome of the legislative process. **Denbighshire must be proactive and begin the process of exploring the implications of the White Paper so as to contribute to the national debate.**

1.15. The White Paper will therefore 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.

1.16. Both the Infrastructure and Regeneration plans highlight the importance of housing in their targets and recommendations:

Homes are vital – affecting health and well being, quality of life, and people’s opportunities. Investing public money in building and refurbishing homes already makes a significant contribution to national and local economies, creating and supporting thousands of jobs and training opportunities. It plays a huge part in regenerating communities and has economic benefits to Wales. (Welsh Government, 2012b, pg.67)

1.17. And similarly, within local plans produced by the Council, the importance of housing is recognised as vital to the County in far more than simply the important process of ensuring everyone has access to a safe and decent home. The ‘Vision for Denbighshire 2025;’ the 2011 Denbighshire: The Big Plan 2011-14, and the 2012 Corporate Plan 2012-17: An excellent council, close to the community detail improved services to the community, in the broadest definition of the term (residents, public and private sector providers alike); the building upon the success achieved and the resources in the County already; as well as the need to continue to build new homes and regenerate the spaces and communities served by the Council.

1.18. These three Council documents, along with the key national documents detailed will form the effective ‘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:

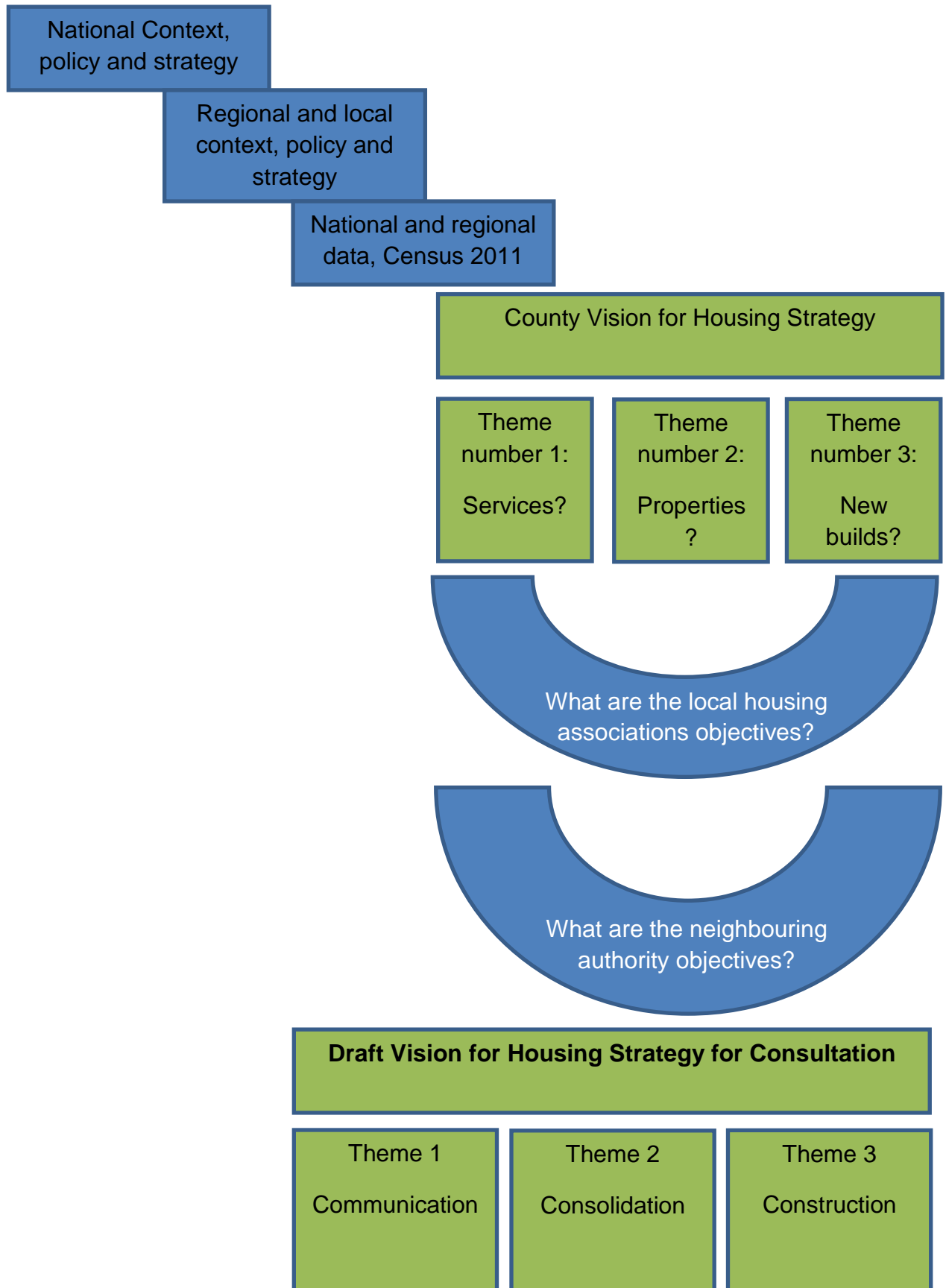
The primary purpose of a Local Housing Strategy is to articulate a locally agreed direction for addressing the housing requirements, problems and opportunities of an area, taking into account national policies and priorities set out in ‘Better Homes for People in Wales’ (Welsh Assembly Government, October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

- 1.19. 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.2 is a visual interpretation of this approach:

Fig.2: Draft model for scoping exercise leading to setting a contextualised County housing vision and strategic objectives.



1.20. The model in fig.2 shows the approach the Housing Team has been using to date in order to set the initial draft vision for the County as well as the 3 themes and initial objectives for consideration at consultation. It also indicated two other elements of the Strategy as it is formed into the first Draft.

1.21. The first element is the importance of a second ‘thread’ through the Strategy to match that provided by key national and local plans. The use of a comparison of 2001 and 2011 Census data, now that the 2011 data is available in full, places the 2013 Strategy at a useful point which the 2011 Update missed due to the timing of that particular study. Furthermore, the 2011 Census and more recent housing market and employability data available from various sources including CACI Paycheck means a review of the 2010/11 data in the 2011 Update can be compared and used as evidence at key points in the Strategy. For example, a comparison of data from 2003 in the Update and 2011 Census data relating to Tenure shows (fig.3):

Tenure	Total number of households in 2003	% of households	Total number of households in 2011 Census	% of households	Change since 2003	% change
Owner-occupied (no mortgage)	14,341	35.80%	14,937	36.80%	596	1.00%
Owner-occupied (with mortgage)	14,400	36.00%	13,122	32.40%	-1,278	-3.60%
Council	3,869	9.70%	3,283	8.10%	-586	-1.60%
Registered Social Landlords	1,738	4.30%	2,042	5.00%	304	0.70%
Private rented	5,657	14.10%	6,383	15.70%	726	1.60%
Other	-	-	63	0.20%	-	
Total	40,005	100.00%	40,005	100.00%		

Fig.3: Comparison of households per tenure in 2003 and from the 2011 Census. Source: Glyndŵr University; Office for National Statistics

1.22. The comparison shows a significant drop in the number of households owning a home with a mortgage, some of whom may have paid off their mortgages in the 8 year period and can be accounted for in the 1% increase in those owner

occupiers without a mortgage. The more significant figure is the larger increase in households renting from private landlords. This represents a significant shift in the tenure profile and is reflective of national trends.

- 1.23. The most recent Dwelling Stock Estimate for Wales published in 2012 indicated a significant and continuing shift in the share of the housing sector by tenure. **While the overall percentage share for the private sector is in Wales is still around 84%, as it was at the last Living in Wales Survey 2008, it is now composed of a decreased 70% owner occupied share against a rising 14% showing for the private rented tenure. The decline of the owner occupied sector is being translated into an increase in the private rented sector.** The shift from 73.4% owner occupied in the Living In Wales Survey to 70% at the stock estimate in 2012 is only slightly larger than that in the County. Therefore, when formulating a Strategic response to this, the Housing Team have, and will continue through the consultation, considered what moves are being made nationally, form example in the White Paper with regards to mandatory accreditation for private landlords, to address a growing private rented sector.
- 1.24. The shift in the tenure profile and national trends in higher private rents against declining household incomes is also evident in fig.4 and 5 arising from the recalculation of affordability in the County from the 2011 Update to 2013. The latest figures show that statistically, **private rent has become more significantly more unaffordable, according to Welsh Government guidance which states that a household spending more than 25% of its gross income on rent is unable to afford that rent, than home ownership with a mortgage.**
- 1.25. Therefore, the affordability threshold table produced in 2011 needs to be rearranges in order to represent the succession of affordability through different tenure types (fig.4 and 5):

Affordable Housing and Open Market Housing Types/tenures	Minimum Household Income Threshold	% of Denbighshire Households below the threshold	Maximum Household Income Threshold
2 Bed Social Rented Affordable Housing	n/a	n/a	£15,600
2 Bed 80% Market Rent	£15,600	22%	£19,552
2 Bed 30% Discount for Sale	£17,625	27%	£35,000
2 Bed Open Market Rent	£19,552	33%	n/a
2 Bed Open Market House	£25,178	47%	n/a

Fig.4: 2011 Affordable Housing & Open Market Housing minimum and maximum income thresholds.

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Affordable Housing and Open Market Housing Types/tenures	Minimum Household Income Threshold	% of Denbighshire Households below the threshold	Maximum Household Income Threshold
2 Bed Social Rented Affordable Housing	n/a	n/a	£13,957
2 Bed 30% Discount for Sale	£15,273	33%	£21,818
2 Bed 80% Market Rent	£19,136	43%	£23,920
2 Bed Open Market House	£21,818	48%	n/a
2 Bed Open Market Rent	£23,920	60%	n/a

Fig.5: 2013 Affordable Housing & Open Market Housing minimum and maximum income thresholds.

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1.26. While the percentage of households unable to afford a mortgage without assistance has stayed largely the same at 48%, intermediate rents have become more unaffordable, linked as they are to private rent levels. This will require a significant evaluation of the recommendations made in the 2011 Update and how the Council now relates to a sector that has become significantly more expensive in a County where, according to the data used to produce fig.5, the median household income band has dropped from 25-30K to 20-25K in the space of 3 years.

1.27. The County Vision for Housing

Everyone is supported to live with pride in homes that meet their needs, in the vibrant and sustainable communities Denbighshire aspires to.

1.28. This Vision for the County has been put to a number of consultation groups, the Scrutiny Group included. On the basis of feedback received, a shorted vision has been produced. This may well change during the course of the drafting of the strategy and the Housing Team welcomes all suggestions and comments.

1.29. Finally, before outlining the three themes, it is worth considering how the Council proceeds with its Core Principles for the Strategy. In 2007 these were given as:

- A home is a **basic right**² for all the people of Denbighshire
- All residents of Denbighshire should have **equal opportunity** to access housing of good quality to meet their needs
- The needs of **vulnerable groups** must be carefully considered
- There should be a **choice** of housing for all residents of Denbighshire
- A home or a lack of a home has a fundamental impact on a wide range of factors which significantly influence any individual's **quality of life** such as health and well-being, educational achievement and economic circumstances
- A **socially inclusive** approach will assist in **sustaining** communities
- Meeting **local needs** is a key part of this strategy
- Ongoing **consultation** is required to determine needs and identify gaps in service provision. (Denbighshire CC, 2007, pg.9)

As a set of principles, the Housing Team would suggest they are a decent reflection both of what has occurred in the County since 2007 and the direction of strategy and policy nationally and regionally and would propose their retention into the 2013 Strategy. It would suggest a continuity between the documents were the Core Principles to be retained.

1.30. With regards to other details that will be included in the full draft, there are a series of methodological notes contained in the LHS Guide and in the key

² Emphasis in bold was present in the original document.

documents already mentioned in this Report. They have been examined and, as agreement on the Vision and Themes is gained, subject to suggestions and amendments arising from the consultation, they will be incorporated into an introductory and context setting section of the Draft Strategy.

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. The National Housing Strategy has 3 areas of action, the 3rd being ‘Improve housing-related services and support, particularly for vulnerable people and people from minority groups.’ (Welsh Government, April 2010, pg.2) and goes on to detail how this would be undertaken:

- (iv) Give people more choice by broadening the range of homes and tenancy arrangements to suit people’s income and circumstances.
- (v) Give tenants a clear voice in decisions that affect them.
- (vi) Make it easier for people to find suitable accommodation, particularly people from minority groups.
- (vii) Ensure services reflect the needs of those who use them not the needs of organisations that deliver them. (Welsh Government, April 2010, pg.3)

The National Housing Strategy places the tenants voice as central to delivery of services in Wales and the Council should seek to do the same.

2.1. Similarly it is vital that engagement goes beyond just the tenants in the County and should encompass all residents, regardless of tenure, if the Council is to meet the commitments set out in the introduction where housing is a function of more than just providing decent homes for those in need as, for example, its narrower focus as a social landlord would suggest. Thus initial actions could include examining commitments detailed in the Council’s Local Tenant Participation Strategy 2011-2014 to broadening their scope and that of the Denbighshire Tenants & Residents Federation.

2.2. Furthermore the White Paper suggests:

The design of services needs to be underpinned by an understanding of people's needs and evidence of what works, fuelled by the goal of continuous improvement. Services are at their best when they are informed or even led by the people who use them. (WG, May 2012, pg.59)

Evidence presented in the other national documents, such as the Welsh Government's 2013 Standards for Improving the Health and Well-being of Homeless People and Specific Vulnerable Groups, and the Wales Audit Office 2010 Housing services for adults with mental health needs agree with the need for engagement order to provide good collaborative services and this is further supported by work undertaken by the Audit Office with regards to engagement not only with the public but also with service providers:

- a. deciding together – where people and councils work together to share views, generate options jointly, and agree a course of action;
- b. acting together – people working with councils to make decisions and help carry through the action agreed; and
- c. supporting local initiatives – in which councils support groups to develop and implement their own solutions – that is, empowerment. (Wales Audit Office, June 2012, pg.22)

2.3. Partners and stakeholders included in good engagement agreements and structures should also include those within the Council but outside of the Housing & Community Development team. Such an approach is recognised in the Council's Corporate Plan 2012-17: Annual Delivery Document 2013-14 which provides extensive commitments to improved services relying on clear communication and engagement opportunities with partners within and without the County.

2.4. Extensive, varied and well delivered engagement opportunities, particularly when aligned to service providers in the County who deal specifically with hard to reach or vulnerable groups will also ensure inclusivity is a key component of engagement within the Strategy period.

- 2.5. **Objective 2: Developing the ‘See Through’ Housing Service**
- 2.6. **Following consultation, the term ‘See Through’ may be replaced with ‘Transparent’ depending on the opinions of other stakeholders and residents.**
- 2.7. The White Paper states ‘Local authorities will improve their strategic role to enable local housing needs to be met by close working between their housing and planning functions, and through efficient housing services.’ (Welsh Government, April 2010, pg.10). The Corporate Plan, and the Denbighshire Big Plan 2011-14 both highlight the need for effective and efficient services and the process of restructuring within the Housing & Community Development team is evidence of their commitment to this.
- 2.8. The Corporate Plan is also clear on the need for the Council to publish a set of Customer Service Standards. Housing & Community Development will already have standards in place for dealing with tenants and, as has been suggested with regards to engagement, these standards should be reviewed and made both more inclusive of all potential customers, regardless of tenure or interest, and potentially fed into the wider Council process of setting these standards.
- 2.9. The use of the term ‘See Through’ indicates the need for the Housing Service to be efficient, accountable, and accessible to the partners of the Housing & Communities Development team and examples of the successes in this area are evident in projects such as SARTH; highlighted in the Corporate Plan as an example of simplifying the process for residents in the County and reducing bureaucracy for all the partner organisations involved. It is also an example of the type of cross border collaborative cooperation at the heart of Welsh Government policy since the mid-2000s and the publication of Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries.

2.10. Gathering and deploying relevant data and intelligence to become the County HUB for Housing.

2.11. The White Paper contains 4 summary points relating to its content. The last two state the Welsh Government, and through it local authorities and other partners, must:

- (iii) Do more to prevent homelessness, and improve housing services to help people, particularly those who are vulnerable, to lead healthy, independent, lives.
- (iv) Make a significant contribution towards our long-term vision by ending family homelessness by 2019. (WG, May 2012, pg.4)

The Welsh Government is asking local authorities to do this at a time of ever decreasing funds matched by ever increasing demands for services across the board, with homelessness widely recognised to be increasing due to the pressures of a stagnant economy and austerity measures; Welfare Reform being the obvious manifestation.

2.12. The issue of homelessness alone is a significant area of work for the Council. However, to fulfil the Council's role to engage with the wide range of residents and stakeholders, and to deliver an efficient and effective 'See Through' service, it must gather, analyse and be able to deploy and disseminate a wide range of data and intelligence it either gathers itself, or shares with the networks successful collaboration and engagement brings to cover all the responsibilities legislation, regulation and policy place upon it.

2.13. The Big Plan is itself an example of drawing together both a wide range of subject areas and correlating them to produce a single document and strategic approach, as fig.6. form the Plan demonstrates:



Fig.6: Big Plan approach from the 2011 Denbighshire Local Services Board Denbighshire: The big Plan 2011-14.

2.14. The gathering of data and intelligence relating to housing issues as understood in the broadest sense set out in this Progress Report requires the Housing & Community Development department, and onwards the Council as a whole, to have clear protocols with partner organisations and potentially an officer capable of coordinating the collection, deployment and dissemination of this data. The Corporate Plan does identify a new Corporate Programme Officer with a role to coordinate project approval. It should be an important part of their role to also coordinate or have an awareness of the intelligence gathered by the Council in order for it to be managed efficiently in order to inform and direct services.

2.15. Examples of the relevance of using good intelligence can be found throughout the national and regional documents, particularly with regards to delivering specialised services. In identifying weaknesses in housing-related needs in Supporting People Operational Plans for example, the Wales Audit Office recommended:

- a. better integrate needs mapping systems for identifying the support needs of different groups of people with other relevant data relating to housing, health and social care;
- b. create information sharing protocols whereby relevant local agencies agree to participate in needs mapping exercises; and
- c. improve the robustness of data by avoiding double counting and data input backlogs. (Wales Audit Office, November 2010, pg.12)

2.16. Particularly with regards to housing related services, the Housing & Community Development team must become an information and intelligence

HUB which, with clear and extensive engagement, and good partnership arrangements, can either deploy effectively its own resources, or be the point of contact for redirecting customers to the best service provider or potential partner. As will be seen when examining grants and loans, as well as opportunities for wider construction and regeneration projects in the following themes, while the Council may not be the source of all funding and sources, it should be the point in the County, and in the region, where residents and stakeholders can access the information and assistance they need.

- 2.17. Furthermore being the effective County HUB for housing related information will also allow the Housing & Community Development team to fulfil other roles the National Housing Strategy, the White Paper and regional documents have identified of the need for positive publicity and awareness to be raised by those with influence. For example, the Council must take a role in publicising private rent (and renting as a whole) as a positive choice and not a one of last resort:

Increasingly, people are renting homes, particularly in and around cities. But it's still not seen as attractive an option as ownership. Unlike most European countries, most people in Wales still want to own their own home. This is sometimes because of the quality of rented homes and poor management by the landlords who own them. But it can also be connected to the perceived stigma attached to renting properties from local authorities or housing associations. (Wales Assembly Government, April 2010, pg.9)

Regionally the 2013 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment undertaken on behalf of another regional collaborative consortium, to which the Council belongs, identified the challenge all participating local authorities had in changing perceptions of the gypsy and traveller communities. This had an impact on gypsies and travellers as groups, as part of the wider black and minority ethnic communities, and in the face of the negative backlash the programme My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding has had on these communities engagement with authorities.

- 2.18. Finally, becoming an intelligence and information HUB will also allow the Council and the Housing & Community Development team to better monitor the communities it serves, and to ensure continuous improvement in these services and to judge their viability and effectiveness over the Strategy period and beyond.
- 2.19. 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 County 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. The work undertaken in Rhyl for example, under the Housing Renewal Area national initiative in West Rhyl, in the North Wales Coast Regeneration Area programme which encompasses the town, and in the 'Rhyl Going Forward' local strategy, bringing the Council together with a broad range of housing and other community interest bodies, is a vital example of what can be achieved. It is also an example of work that is very much still ongoing and likely to extend beyond the life of the proposed Strategy period 2013 to 2018. Both nationally in the Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan for Growth and Jobs, and locally in Corporate Plan, the commitment to tackling the deprivation in parts of Rhyl and upper Denbigh is important and will form part of the emphasis in eventual draft Strategy.

- 3.9. Similarly the **Consolidation** theme will also stress the importance of working with the rural communities in the County who often exist at a distance from main routes such as the A55, and areas designated for national regeneration funds. Both national and local documents recognise the need to meet rural needs where development may concentrate as much on understanding service needs, as dealing with physical improvements to properties. The Big Plan has its 5th objective targeted at rural issues, stating: 'Rural areas may not feature as deprived areas, but rural areas may suffer from poverty that is

hidden. For example, poverty of services, lack of employment and other opportunities.’ (DLSB, 2011, pg.28). The Strategy, both in the **Communication** theme and throughout will seek to ensure rural issues are given the prominence they require in the objectives set.

3.10. **Objective 1: Enhancing and making the most of the Existing Housing Stock**

3.11. The National Housing Strategy and the White Paper both place the improvement of existing housing stock as high priorities for Wales. The National Housing Strategy highlights the need to: (ii) Improve the quality and standard of all existing houses and rented accommodation, including their energy efficiency. (Welsh Assembly Government, April 2010, pg.3). The White Paper contains a number of suggested new or strengthened powers, building for example on the enforcement actions available to the Council through existing measures such as the Housing Health & Safety Ratings System (HHSRS), enacted in Wales in 2006.

3.12. The White Paper summary states:

- (i) Increase the supply of new homes... by bringing 5,000 empty properties back into use.
- (ii) Improve the quality of existing homes, including their energy efficiency, through the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and other mechanisms. (Welsh Government, May 2012, pg.4)

Among the tools proposed in the White Paper is the potential for local authorities to apply higher Council Tax charges on long term empty properties and within the Paper is further detail and examination of more recent national schemes such as the ‘Houses into Homes’ programme which seeks to allow property owners to access loans in order to improve properties for sale or rent.

3.13. The Council, in partnership with other agencies, notable North West Wales Housing with regards to the Empty Homes Strategy, and in the use of both Rural and Coastal Housing Enablers has had successes over the 2007 Strategy period in bringing empty homes back into use as open market properties and affordable housing. This commitment was reflected in the 2007 Strategy and is given similar status in the Corporate plan which states:

- We will ensure that more empty homes are brought back into use.
- We will focus on derelict and eyesore sites in our communities to ensure they are redeveloped to meet the housing needs of the community.
- We will ensure that our council housing meets the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and is sustained to that standard over the course of the Housing Stock Business Plan. (Denbighshire CC, 2012, pg,12)

3.14. In order for the Council to meet these obligations, to utilise the powers available, and those potentially to follow the White Paper as the legislation is agreed, it must continue to enhance the relationships it has already with providers who have assisted in bringing empty properties back into use. Furthermore it must build on existing expertise relating to fund and grant applications, either for monies it controls itself or that is available through other agencies, to develop the HUB role detailed in the **Communication** theme. By doing this, the Council and the Housing & Communities Development team specifically, can act as the BRIDGE between the private sector home owners and landlords and other agencies in the County and beyond to maximise the potential improvements to the stock. The Corporate Plan Annual Delivery Document for 2013-14 states it will 'Introduce re-payable loans to allow home owners to improve living conditions.' (Denbighshire CC, 2013, pg.10) It is vital the Council explores both how it can direct funds and how it can help interested parties in the County to access other funding streams in order to maximise the return of empty properties to better use, and to enhance standards in the housing sector.

3.15. Similarly the Welsh Housing Quality Standard as a measure of improvement should be applied across the housing tenures in the County. The National Housing Strategy states:

The Welsh Housing Quality Standard does not apply to private houses but the need for improvement is similar. Encouraging owners to do this can be difficult, particularly where their financial means are limited.
(WAG, April 2010, pg.12)

While the Council must continue its pledge to improve its own social housing stock to the Standard (and progress in this area will be included in the Draft Strategy), acting as a HUB for intelligence and as a BRIDGE for loan and

grant applications should extend to applying the Standard to private sector housing, both owner occupied and rented. There are a number of national schemes operated and many of these are highlighted in the White paper. For example, the NEST scheme to tackle Fuel Poverty and the measures taken by the Welsh Government itself:

We are also taking action to ensure that people benefit from UK-led initiatives such as the new Energy Company Obligation, which will replace the Carbon Emission Reduction Target (known as “CERT”) and the Community Energy Savings Programme (known as “CESP”), and the Green Deal. (Welsh Government, May 2012, pg.45)

- 3.16. It is accepted that the Council is experiencing increasing pressures on its budgets as these budgets are simultaneously cut. With regards to renewal area grants, energy efficiency, improved Standards, Empty Homes etc., being able to accurately direct home owners to the appropriate internal or external funding sources, assisting with such applications by using the intelligence at the Council’s disposal, is one way in which the Housing & Community Development team could truly and directly enhance its strategic housing role.
- 3.17. **Objective 2: Working with the Private Rented Sector to help landlords and tenants**
- 3.18. As noted in the **Communication** theme, the Council has a role to play, in partnership with the Private Rented Sector, in seeking to enhance public perceptions of private renting and private landlords. The gains in West Rhyl for example, often working with private landlords and Homes in Multiple Occupation (HMO) have sought to create:

... a sustainable housing market in West Rhyl where the requirement for ongoing public investment in the private housing stock and general physical environment is significantly reduced and the area become **one of housing choice rather than need**³; (DCC, November 2011, pg.6)

³ Emphasis in bold from the original text.

As with all such relationships, the actions of a few poor landlords can taint the perception of the whole sector, and this is as true in Denbighshire as it is elsewhere in Wales.

3.19. The White Paper addresses this issue and proposes to:

- Legislate for a national, mandatory, registration and accreditation scheme for private landlords, lettings and management agents based on agreed Codes of Practice, and ensure every tenant has a written tenancy agreement.
- Use the accreditation scheme to promote the Green Deal and other energy efficiency initiatives. (Welsh Government, May 2012, pg.51)

While there has been some resistance to this in the consultation following the White Paper, there is an acceptance that voluntary accreditation only tends to pick up those landlords interested in being accredited and recognised as good landlords; thereby missing those whose actions truly merit closer inspection.

3.20. The White Paper recognises the complexity of the sector, showing the wide range of potential landlord types:

- (i) Business landlords - letting provides most of their income and they see their property as an investment.
- (ii) Sideline investor landlords - let property as a part-time activity and typically own a small number of rental properties.
- (iii) Sideline non-investor landlords – have become a landlord for varying reasons e.g. inheriting a property.
- (iv) Institutional landlords - large-scale, often corporate organisations, who own and rent property as part of their business.

There is a lack of data on private landlords in Wales. It has been estimated that in England and Wales, there are 700,000 landlords. Of these, just over two per cent belong to professional organisations. The sector is thought to be dominated by small scale landlords. Research suggests that around a third of landlords own only one property, 65 per cent own fewer than 10 properties. Two-thirds of private rented dwellings are thought to be owned by individuals with the remaining one-third split between companies and organisations. (Welsh Government, May 2012, pg.48)

For the Council, the challenge is to consider what it can do to make private renting now an attractive choice; particularly as the evidence shown earlier in the profiling example identifies this is a growing sector.

- 3.21. The Council already has enforcement and monitoring powers, or access to existing models, in the HMO Licencing, the HHSRS, Tenancy Deposit Scheme, and the Voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scheme. The Council could consider, for example, introducing a County-wide standard tenancy agreement pro forma for use by the private sector based on its own agreements and developed in conjunction with local Registered Social Landlords. There are examples of Registered Social Landlords working with Private Sector landlords in Wales which could be explored.
- 3.22. Evidence presented to the National Assembly for Wales Communities and Culture Committee during 2010 and 2011 relating to Making the Most of the Private Rented Sector identified a need for private rent to begin to compete with the ‘... security of tenure, low rents, high standards of management and maintenance and accountability.’ (National Assembly for Wales, February 2011, pg.15) While the report recognised this would be a difficult task for the private sector to achieve quickly, it should be the role of the Council, as it waits for the White Paper to become law, to actively seek partnerships and enhancements in the private rented sector in order to begin to afford tenants in this sector the access to engagement, security, and higher standards social tenants already enjoy.
- 3.23. It is important to note, with regards to private, social and specialised landlords, that the last few years have seen significant upsets in both sectors where services have come near to collapse in areas where traditionally such failures would not have been expected. The near-collapse until their rescue of the Southern Cross Healthcare in 2011, providing care home accommodation, and more recently the take-over bail out of the Cosmopolitan Housing Group, which provided general needs and student accommodation, shows even providers in oversubscribed markets are not immune from trouble. Furthermore such a major collapse would be detrimental not only to the residents of these organisations, but also to the wider sector. The **Communication** theme calls on the Council to engage with external partners

and to be a source of intelligence. Under **Consolidation**, as much as the Council must involve itself in the private sector to enhance those relationships, it must also apply the same principles of being an active partner with the larger social housing and care providers in the County to ensure continuity not only of standards but also of service.

3.24. **Objective 3: Ensuring effective leadership and partnership in delivering Specialised Services**

3.25. The Council, directly, through partnerships and other mechanisms assists in providing services to a number of hard to reach and vulnerable communities, households and individuals. The White Paper states:

Local authorities have a particularly important role to play. They deliver essential housing services direct to the public but they also have a vital strategic housing role. There is scope for further improvement in both. We want to see greater collaboration between authorities, including the sharing of expertise and limited resources. Some forward-looking authorities are already working in this way. Informed by household projections, establishing local housing needs and ensuring planning mechanisms to address these is perhaps one of the most critical roles for local authorities. Addressing need is not just about building new homes. It also involves considering the extent to which their strategies meet the needs of different groups, including demand for adapted and accessible housing. It should also consider the broader accommodation and support needed to help people. This includes specialist support services, refuges to support women escaping domestic violence, and other forms of accommodation, for example, to prevent rough sleeping. (WG, May 2012, pg.20)

The importance of the Council acting as a HUB relating to engagement, services and intelligence has been established, as has its role as a BRIDGE with the public and private sectors. With regards to specialised services, national documents such as the Welsh Government's 2013 Standards for Improving the Health and Well-being of Homeless People and Specific Vulnerable Groups highlight the need for integrated services underpinned by good intelligence and partnership work for groups identified in the context of this particular set of national Standards as the:

- homeless
- asylum seekers and refugees (for the first two years following granting of refugee status)
- Gypsies and Travellers
- Substance Misusers

- EU migrants who are homeless or living in circumstances of insecurity or who are vulnerable to homelessness. (Welsh Government, April 2013, pg.2)

3.26. Within the Draft Strategy and in the action plan to follow it, examination of specific tasks and measures relating to older people, disabled people, gypsies and travellers, as well as communities under the black and minority ethnic descriptor will be detailed in line with current legislation, regulation and good practice. For the purpose of this Progress Report, the overarching principles of addressing the needs and demands of these groups are evidenced in the National Housing Strategy under the 'Better Services to Improve People's Lives' theme, particularly with regards to 2 of the priorities in this area:

- (v) Do as much as possible to prevent homelessness but where it occurs, provide efficient services to help people to find accommodation.
- (vi) Provide housing-related advice, guidance and support, including financial and debt management advice, to help people to stay in their homes and to help them to make best use of their income. (Welsh Assembly Government, April 2010, pg.16)

Both are underpinned by the details of the **Communication** theme presented in this Progress Report and require the Council to have in place the relationships and agreements required to assist households and individuals as they become vulnerable and, if they are unable to prevent issues arising, to aid them when they do become vulnerable.

3.27. Furthermore, with regards to the latter of the National Housing Strategy priorities, the current economic climate, and the evolving impact of Welfare Reform, mean the importance of the Council's role as a HUB for information and a BRIDGE relating to loans and grants must also extend to directly helping not only vulnerable and those requiring specialised care, but all residents who may be experiencing various pressures relating to housing. The Council recognises this in the Corporate Plan, stating: 'We will adapt the level of support we offer our customers in light of the UK Government's welfare reforms.' (Denbighshire CC, 2012, pg.12) While it is vital that specialised services are directed at those most in need of assistance, relying again on good engagement, a 'See Through' service, and good intelligence, developing these services on a basis of applicability and access to a broad range of

potential customers should be a guiding principle in their design. Such adaptability would mean those services designated in the Draft Strategy will be able to meet a changing environment of financial and social pressures.

- 3.28. The need for such adaptability as well as directed and targeted services can be seen in the Welsh Government's 2009 Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales, as well as the Wales Audit Office's 2010 Housing services for adults with mental health needs. Both call for closer cooperation and intelligence sharing between agencies as well as better relations between local authorities and the private rented sector which is often relied upon to take up the slack when the need for accommodation has to be met. It is important, in the development of better relations with the private rented sector, that the Council applies the standards and good practice detailed in national documents relating to specialised services and those aimed at vulnerable people and households to the private sector as well as to specialised care providers.
- 3.29. With regards to adaptability, a one-size-fits-all approach is equally unhelpful. It is not always the case that specialised accommodation is required, either in the public or the private sector. Therefore the Council must ensure provision is made to assist communities, households and individuals with particular social, physical or cultural needs to live in a manner suited to them. For example, with regards to vulnerable people, the Corporate Plan is has a clear priority that encapsulates many of the objectives proposed in this Progress Report as well as underlying the importance of choice in the services and options residents are able to access:

Priority: Vulnerable people are protected and are able to live as independently as possible

Vulnerable People can live as independently as possible

- We will develop two or three additional extra care housing schemes across the county.
- We will continue to develop our reablement service, which supports people to accommodate their illness by learning or relearning, daily living skills.
- We will develop our programme of providing assistive technology to support adults to remain safe and independent.
- We will work with local organisations to develop community-based activities that help people to remain active and independent.

- We will adapt homes to meet the needs of disabled residents, and reduce the time it takes to deliver disability facility grants
Vulnerable people are protected
- We will work with health, the police and the voluntary sector to further develop early intervention approaches to protecting vulnerable adults, children and families.
- We will ensure that vulnerable people at risk of becoming homeless have access to suitable and appropriate accommodation. (DCC, 2012, pg.10)

Many of these points will have come originally from the Housing & Community Development team in the consultation for the Corporate Plan and it is important that these same principles are carried through into the Draft Strategy.

3.30. Finally, with regards to the objectives set out in the **Communication** theme and here in the **Consolidation** theme, examination of national documents and recommendations, and evidence of schemes which have worked well in the region and the County, rely on the Council working closely with partners within and without the County. This has often included employing or partly supporting (through grants etc.) dedicated officers for specific tasks. Recent national, regional and local documents all make recommendations relating to specific officers dedicated to specific tasks, particularly around specialised care services and targeted areas such as landlord relations. However, in a time of budget cuts and efficiencies, detailed in the Corporate Plan and beyond, it is not viable for the Council and the Housing & Community Development team in particular, to seek out new staff for every demand, or to take staff off current roles in order to fulfil new ones.

3.31. Therefore, it is important for the Council to include in the roles detailed in the **Communication** and the **Consolidation** themes to explore funding streams and cross-boundary partnerships where specific projects requiring dedicated officers can be shared between organisations to both share the cost load and gain the benefit of a wider working relationship likely to afford a level of continuity locally and regionally. Building on the types of partnership work already evidenced in recent documentation will allow the Council to deploy its strategic housing role more effectively and more inclusively and will benefit

the development of the objectives to be detailed in the final proposed theme of the Draft Strategy; **Construction**.

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 recognised need and demand

4.7. The National Strategy Housing Strategy contains the theme 'More Housing, More Choice' which described in 2010 the unstable nature of the house building industry in Wales:

Despite action to support the industry, house building has reduced dramatically because of the recession. That said, progress has still

been made on increasing the number of affordable homes in Wales. In 2007-08 and 2008-09, another 4,235 affordable homes were built, which is more than half way towards the target of an extra 6,500 homes by 2011. (Welsh Assembly Government, April 2010, pg.9)

Despite the downturn, the Welsh Government was able to deliver the 6,500 home commitment, and now has a new target, detailed in the White Paper, to

- (i) Increase the supply of new homes: a) by 7,500 new affordable homes, of which 500 will be co-operative homes and 500 will be built on surplus public sector sites, and b) by bringing 5,000 empty properties back into use. (Welsh Government, May 2012, pg.4)

4.8. The new target is to be met by the end of the current Welsh Government's period in office (2015) and the White Paper and ministerial statements associated with the target are linked to various innovations and new models for partnership and funding which will be considered in brief in this Progress Report and in more detail in the Draft Strategy. Meeting such an ambitious target in a time of austerity will not entirely be a case of finding new money for new builds, as recognised in the priority detailed above where delivering the overall target of 12,500 homes relies on two fifths of these being restored empty properties.

4.9. Within the national debates, as evidenced in the Welsh Government 2011 report, Meeting the Housing Challenge: Building a consensus for action, a precursor to the White Paper, the current economic climate has forced a rethink of the terms and references used in the housing sector:

The term "affordable housing" has long been used as a substitute for "social housing" but is being used by some in a broader sense; that is, to describe a home that someone can afford, based on their income and circumstances. In reality, this is "affordability" and the two terms should not be confused. Our commitment to social housing has not changed. Indeed, in the current economic circumstances, our resolve to help those whose needs cannot be met by the housing market is even greater.

"Affordability" is different to affordable housing and arguably, is a function of supply and demand. But several factors affect it. The combined effects of the economic downturn, possible employment losses and rising prices already mean that many individuals and families, whether renting or owning, are struggling to meet their

housing costs. Central to our purpose is not only increasing the supply of housing but equally, a commitment to enhancing the help that is available to people to cope with these pressures and the potential impact on their lives. (Welsh Government, December 2011, pg.4)

The need for this form of revaluation was evident in the 2011 Update produced by the Housing Team for the Council which recognised the need to balance a statistical need and demand for new housing with the equal need ‘...for local authorities to create a planning environment which encourages developers to invest in new housing for the open market in order to then facilitate realistic affordable housing targets.’ (Glyndŵr, June 2011, pg.6)

4.10. The requirement for a progressive approach to the direction of housing policy decisions is reflected in the Corporate Plan which states:

The housing market in Denbighshire will offer a range of types and forms of housing in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of individuals and families

- We will introduce planning policies that ensure a suitable mix of housing throughout the county.
- ...
- We will explore options with social landlords and the private sector for investment in new housing provision.
- We will develop a range of housing opportunities for young people across the county.
- We will develop a range of low cost affordable housing options for rent and sale for local people. (DCC, 2012, pg.12)

4.11. Furthermore the Council will also need to provide new accommodation for specific sections of the County population, reflecting demographic changes and the needs of vulnerable groups, as recognised in the 2010 Integrated Partnership Needs Assessment produced in preparation for the BIG Plan by the Denbighshire Local Services Board:

Need 9: Housing:

- Denbighshire needs more affordable housing and housing that will be suited to the needs of an aging population and vulnerable adults (such as those with mental health problems), who are likely to be living independently. Young people’s housing needs are also great and vulnerable young people’s support needs generally are often great (e.g. help to get back in to work or training). (Denbighshire Local Services Board, 2010, pg.67)

The need for these forms of accommodation, as with the White Paper priority relating to both new build and the restoration of empty homes, does not have

to rely entirely on new builds. However it will rely on partnerships and innovations that require a clear and well managed housing and planning policy to underpin future developments.

4.12. Therefore, the Draft Strategy will need to incorporate the latest policy statements produced by the Council, informed by national planning and housing guidance. The encapsulation of these will be contained in the final version of the Council's Local Development Plan which, according to the latest Joint Housing Land Availability Study 2012 will be in place in during the early period of the 2013 Strategy period.

4.13. **Objective 2: Seeking out new Innovations in investment and regeneration opportunities**

4.14. To meet the ambitious national target the Welsh Government has launched and plans to bring about a series of new financing and investment opportunities that draw together public and private funding arrangements on order to encourage housing development. For the County, meeting its share of the national target through the planning period and new build delivery targets in the Local Development Plan will require close examination of the schemes proposed by the Welsh Government and the innovations it details in the White Paper, for example, relating to projects such as Ely Bridge in Cardiff.

4.15. Prior to the White Paper, the National Housing Strategy recognised the need to '(ii) Increase the level of private sector investment in housing' (Welsh Assembly Government, April 2010, pg.3). And the White Paper, echoing the issues raised with regards to creating a suitable planning environment for encouraging house building detailed in the 2011 Update, states:

We must also look deeper at what lies behind the problem of housing supply. (...)We recognise factors which may be preventing stakeholders from contributing to increasing supply. House builders identify negative land values, the requirements of Section 106 agreements and building regulations as having potentially negative impacts. Continual dialogue is essential to resolve these issues in a way that supports our common economic, social and environmental objectives. (Welsh Government, May 2012, pg.19)

The Council must therefore continue to engage in dialogue with house builders and commissioning organisations (such as Registered Social

Landlords) to ensure the delivery of the new homes needed. This will likely require examining how the affordable housing requirements on a site by site basis can be best delivered. The Draft Strategy will consider these in light of national as well as regional good practice. For example Flintshire County Council's approach to gifted homes on development was recognised by the Chartered Institute for Housing Wales in 2011 as an example of progressive engagement to overcome barriers associated with Section 106 agreements.

4.16. The White Paper also suggests different forms of housing project delivery, including co-operative housing as part of the development of a portfolio of pioneering projects for the Welsh housing sector. Furthermore, the White Paper and the Infrastructure Investment Plan highlight the need to seek other forms of funding as the ability of the Council to rely on traditional sources such as the Social Housing Grant continues to diminish: 'Using innovative finance approaches, where they offer value for money and are appropriate to use.' (Welsh Government, 2012b, pg.12)

4.17. While not all forms of new project types or financing streams may be appropriate for the County, for example the Ely Bridge Scheme relies on a certain mass of housing before it is viable and therefore precludes its use on smaller sites, it is vital for the Council to explore the avenues open to it. The Infrastructure Investment Plan goes on to detail:

Priorities

- £6m to expand the successful Welsh Housing Partnership, leveraging in an investment of £30m in total to deliver 280 family homes for intermediate rent.

...

- And, working with RSLs, launching a Welsh Housing Bond. We are committing £4m a year of funding for thirty years to support a Bond issue of over £100m, which will finance delivery of more than 1,000 affordable homes over the next four years.

Also we will

- Developing new and innovative ways to access housing e.g. co-operative housing and mutual home ownership which has led to the establishment of a co-operative housing stakeholder group formed of key housing and co-operative experts to develop a strategic approach to this work. The co-operative housing stakeholder group is supporting a number of pioneer co-operative housing projects

and is exploring new sources of funding and any legislative barriers to developing this housing.

- Supporting the development and implementation of a Welsh Housing Bond through providing revenue funding.
- Support and evaluate innovative models such as the Welsh Housing Partnership and the development at Ely Bridge, Cardiff. (Welsh Government, 2012b, pg.16)

The viability of all these forms of schemes should be explored in the County with the relevant likely partners in order to best place the Council in a position to capitalise on future opportunities.

4.18. Similarly, the Council should not only explore those schemes and innovations detailed in documents like the White Paper. There are other examples available relating, for example, to investment opportunities with the large Pension Funds in the UK that see housing as a safer investment during economic periods of stagnation. Furthermore, the period of the 2013 Strategy may see the granting of tax and borrowing powers to the Welsh Assembly. The example of this in Scotland offers guidance on future opportunities for Wales and these too will be detailed in the Draft Strategy.

4.19. **Objective 3: Ensuring housing policy helps drive the local and regional economy.**

4.20. The placing of policy at the heart of the local and regional economy is perhaps one of the easier objectives to produce. The National Housing Strategy states:

- (vii) Make best use of investment in housing and other regeneration activity to create more jobs and training opportunities, and to improve the look and feel of communities, and the services and facilities available to local people.

...

Investment in housing and housing-related support services does not only meet people's needs for a home. It brings with it benefits for the economy, for jobs and training opportunities, for people's health and well being, and for the environment. It also helps tackle poverty and inequalities and opens up new opportunities for people. There is scope to do more. (Welsh Assembly Government, April 2010, pg.3)

And this if further recognised in the White Paper in fig.7 which graphically demonstrated the relationship between housing policy and the wider benefits outputs and outcomes:

Diagram 1: Broad policy outcomes from investment in housing

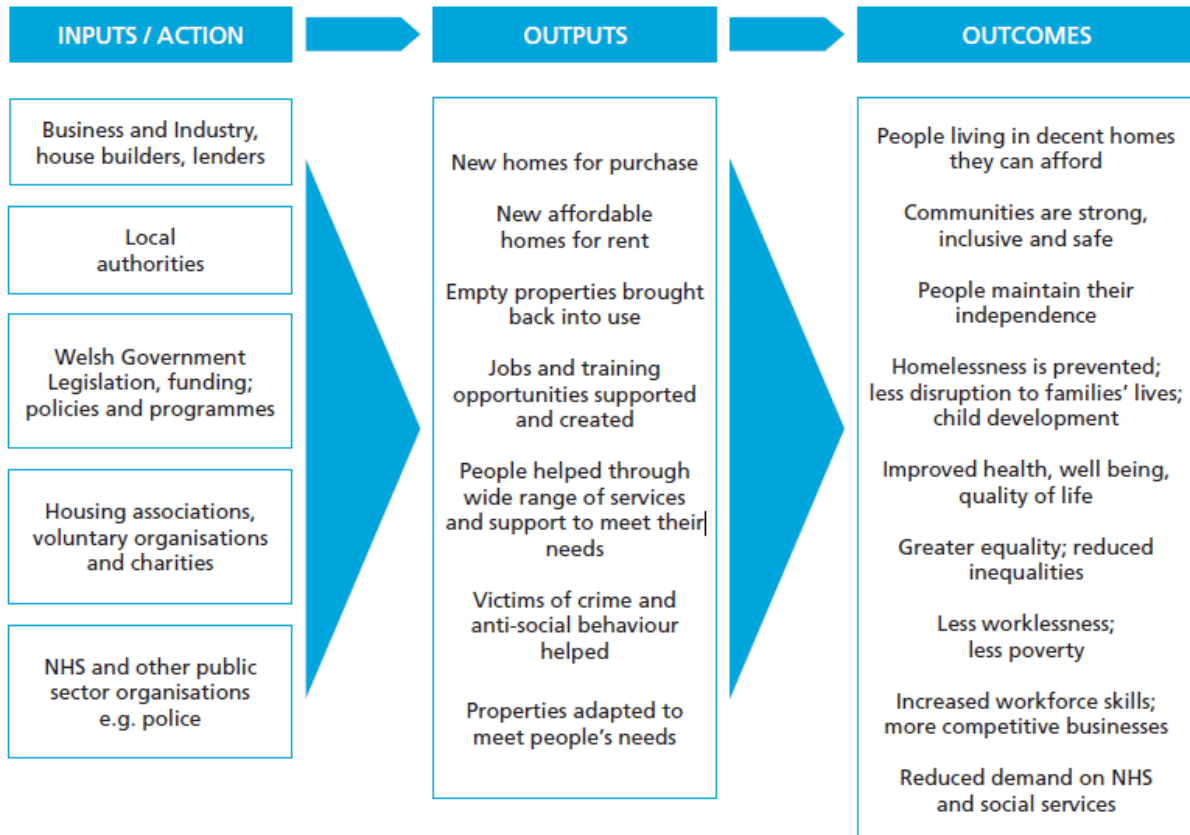


Fig.7: Broad policy outcomes from investment in housing. From Welsh Government's 2012 Homes for Wales: A White Paper for Better Lives in Communities.

4.21. The Draft Strategy must make sure issues relating to local jobs, procurement policy, investments and partnerships are directed at benefiting the residents of the County not only in providing homes and jobs, but also in securing long term quality of life improvement. The National Housing Strategy recognises that for every million pound invested in affordable homes, it generates work for 21 people over the year in construction, not including those then required for repair and maintenance. Furthermore the Welsh Government recognises the importance of an active housing sector in helping people out of poverty:

- (i) Providing jobs.
- (ii) Providing financial information and skills to manage income and expenditure, which helps people tackle problems associated with debt, increases their available income, and overcomes the anxiety, depression and worry that poverty and financial problems cause.¹⁹

- (iii) Showing how people can cut their energy bills, with the associated financial benefits, which helps tackle fuel poverty. (Welsh Assembly Government, April 2010, pg.19)

4.22. To ensure the maximum benefit for the County from not only new and improved homes as detailed in the **Construction** and the **Consolidation** themes, but also in the work and employment required to gain these advances, the HUB and BRIDGE models described in the Progress Report must be developed and maintained. Recent developments by the Welsh Local Government Authority relating to collaboration make clear the importance of broader partnerships, including with regards to procurement and service delivery:

- To share information on what works well and, where appropriate, reform processes in the light of what works best
- To develop and agree regional plans where the decisions of one local authority have an impact on another
- To share the procurement of goods and services - jointly developing and managing markets and supply chains in the knowledge that they transcend administrative boundaries
- To jointly deliver services where there are economies of scale to be obtained for transactional processes, greater resilience from larger working groups and quality gains to be achieved from greater specialisation (Welsh Local Government Authority, October 2008, pg.6)

It is vital the Council seeks out all opportunities to maximise the broad benefit of the projects it operates and supports, particularly as the investment funds it has to rely on are smaller and under more pressure than during the previous Strategy period.

4.23. There have been notable successes for the Council in the area of maximising the benefits, recognised broadly, for example, in the 2009 [A Review of Renewal Areas in Wales: Report Prepared by Jonathan Willis for the Welsh Assembly Government](#) which stated

It is evident that the improvements made in Renewal Areas have provided increased employment opportunities. Eighty four percent of local authorities who supplied information reported employment gains. Eight local authorities were able to demonstrate a reduction in unemployment in percentage terms of between 0.5% and 4%. (Willis, September 2009, pg.8)

And the Corporate Plan identifies the need to develop the local economy as one of its main priorities. Successfully deploying the Draft Strategy with the broad intention of social and economic improvement, as well as creating a stronger housing sector, will be a guiding principle for the 2013 Strategy.

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Appendix 1:

Feedback Report from Public Engagement Event, 5th of June 2013

The event, held in Ruthin on the 5th of June as part of the initial consultation for the Local Housing Strategy.

It was facilitated by Colin Stuhlfelder of Glyndŵr University who are assisting Denbighshire County Council in producing the Strategy Draft

The main information gathering technique used was a ‘Cocktail Party’:

How the ‘Cocktail Party’ worked:

This session will be an all-group activity.

- The Vision for the Strategy, each of the 3 Themes and the 3 Objectives for each theme are put up on flip chart sheets on the walls of a room and introduced by Colin one by one.
- The audience will be invited to take part of a pad of post-it notes and a marker/felt tip pen.
- They can then wander around the room, discussing the themes and adding their comments and suggestions to those sheets where they have a contribution to make. (Prompts for likely contributions are made at the start)
- Once the audience has completed their wander, or at an agreed time, the sheets will be examined and, with their help, the post-it notes will be repositioned on the sheets, allowing the audience to directly set the priorities from each sheet.
- Can Use **N**ow **S**ooner **L**ater for example.
- Once agreed, the post-it notes can be cellotaped into place to retain the input of the audience.

The notes to follow include the ‘headers’ from each sheet and the feedback placed on post it notes and then reorganised by the attendees.

All the comments included here will be incorporated in the process and the full write up of a Strategy Draft.

The Vision for Housing in Denbighshire 2013-2018:

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.

Feedback indicated the Vision was too long and too wordy, as was actually pointed out by Colin when the Vision was revealed to the attendees.

While the Cocktail Party went on, suggestions were made and Colin made some quick changes to the vision statement based on what was seen around the room.

On the vision above, the following words were struck out initially:

~~**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.**~~

Comments on what the Vision could include were:

- 1.1. Everyone deserves a home that meets their needs
- 1.2. For everyone in Denbighshire to be proud to live there because "it's a good place to live"
- 1.3. Good homes for good lives

As a result of these comments and those on other sheets, Colin proposed:

Everyone is able to live in a place that truly meets their needs and aspirations.

Or

Everyone is able to live with pride in a home that meets their needs, and a community they feel a part of.

And on reflection:

Everyone is supported to live with pride in homes that meet their needs, in the vibrant and sustainable communities Denbighshire aspires to.

Additional general comments relating to the Strategy were:

- 1.4. Seeking stable communities rather than transient ones

- 1.5. Housing standards should adhere to minimum legal requirements (on discussion this was found that this related to the Council's enforcement action with the private housing sector. Other attendees spoke of the need for some flexibility and adaptability in other sectors, for example dealing with the needs of residents with specialised requirements)
- 1.6. Need to treat all equally in all tenures and to suit all individual needs. There was a feeling that the needs of the most disabled were not being met, especially when they want to be part of the community.
- 1.7. There is a need to reconsider the staffing group who attends and responds to specialised housing meetings.
- 1.8. Needs to be higher level and perhaps varied staff, for example development officers, Empty Homes officers, managers etc.
- 1.9. Need to offer Disabled Facilities Grant or mirror the DFG in council properties and if not to mirror this mandatory grant
- 1.10. Council is very good at small adaptations but when it comes to adaptations for the most disabled, discrimination is occurring.

The General comments will be pooled with others presented on the various sheets used in the Cocktail Party.

Housing Strategy Theme 1:

Communication:

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

There were no comments relating to the theme itself. Instead attendees made suggestions for what it should include and how it could be approached.

- 1.11. The Website needs to be improved and the Tai Teg model was suggested. This website brings housing opportunities to the people of Anglesey and Gwynedd: <http://www.taiteg.org.uk/>
- 1.12. The internal communication in the Council also needs to be improved.
- 1.13. The community councils need to be listened to.
- 1.14. Regular “surgeries” should be held to include public and private sector housing, planning, regeneration, private sector practitioners etc. under one roof.
- 1.15. Considerations of the Public Sector and the Private Sector should be considered together.
- 1.16. Should all forms of communication so everyone knows what is happening. Should include radio; one stop shops; websites; posters etc.
- 1.17. Be creative and think outside of the box.

An additional general comment was:

- 1.18. Change public perception that private renting is bad.

Theme 1: **Communication:**

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

Objective 1.1.

“Broad and inclusive Engagement opportunities across all tenures”

Again there were no comments relating to the wording or the appropriateness of the Objective.

Comments on how to support this Objective were:

- 1.19. Positive action to reach out to minority groups, particularly those whose 1st language isn't English.
- 1.20. Link with relevant departments in the Council and other organisations.
- 1.21. Link to financial institutions
- 1.22. In order to involve all parties and residents to engage, it should be made “fun”
- 1.23. It should run “...across all occupiers”
- 1.24. Should send out annual questionnaires with Council Tax notices
- 1.25. To have a positive attitude to new ideas, “Don't always say ‘no it won't work’ as there is always a solution!”
- 1.26. Make full use of the County Voice newsletter.

Theme 1: **Communication:**

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

Objective 1.2.

“Developing the ‘See Through’ Housing Service”

There were a few alternative suggestions to the term ‘See Through’. These were using ‘Transparent’ (made by two attendees, one of whom suggested ‘See through = no substance’ or even the ‘Glass Housing Department’.

Comments on how to support this Objective were:

- 1.27. How will the department know what people want to see?
- 1.28. Training will be required around stigma and discrimination to help support vulnerable groups/clients
- 1.29. Those at the top need to understand what it is like being someone trying to use the service
- 1.30. Need to understand how to engage with those that are difficult to engage with.
- 1.31. Staff need to understand the needs of disabled people to engage and how to engage.
- 1.32. Soft skills such as approachability and listening should be sought.
- 1.33. Services need to be honest
- 1.34. Need to broadcast “We want to talk and listen”
- 1.35. Assess the impact of the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) on services

Theme 1: **Communication:**

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

Objective 1.3.

“Gathering and deploying relevant data and intelligence to become the County HUB for Housing”

Again there were no comments on the Objective itself, rather suggestions were made around the approach and also the importance of the individual in the data.

Comments on how to support this Objective were:

- 1.36. Provide training for professionals in the field to disseminate the data.
- 1.37. How will this training be achieved?
- 1.38. Who will coordinate the data?
- 1.39. What is the relevant data and how will users of the service be informed?
- 1.40. Data needs to be reliable and accurate.
- 1.41. Keep it simple to include people.
- 1.42. Having the evidence of “need” to feed into other processes. Partnership working to share data and knowledge and the methodology to avoid duplication and meet monitoring needs.
- 1.43. Info on hidden housing need.
- 1.44. Philosophy and utilitarianism: Mustn’t forget the individual in the mass of data
- 1.45. Gathering data needs to start by determining which outcome you want to achieve.
- 1.46. Again SARTH was mentioned with the need for housing waiting lists to be up to date and have the correct information

Housing Strategy Theme 2:

Consolidation:

To build on the successes achieved, and to protect and improve the assets the County already has

Attendees had no comments on the use of the term Consolidation. Rather they made comments on what it should cover:

- 2.1. Agreed that the Council has achieved grass root results (houses built) and good working systems and internal/external relationships over the last 10 years of “boom”. Need systems in place to continue if possible to maintain positive achievements.
- 2.2. Build on good work done in the past. Use national benchmarks on adapting properties
- 2.3. Start talking to other professionals again.
- 2.4. Promote schemes that have gone well.
- 2.5. Raise the profile of good schemes, keep pressure on empty homes owners; that Big Brother is watching
- 2.6. Need not to lose momentum
- 2.7. Again better communication is needed across the board, not just in one section and sending the right people to meetings.
- 2.8. Go across ‘artificial’ boundaries.
- 2.9. Create a stronger network to encourage more participants
- 2.10. Encourage projects to engage across the board; making the most of what we’ve got.
- 2.11. Need to ensure good spread of services throughout the County, not just Rhyl.

Theme 2: **Consolidation:**

To build on the successes achieved, and to protect and improve the assets the County already has

Objective 2.1.

“Enhancing and making the most of the Existing Housing Stock”

Attendees had no comments on the use of the Objective itself. Rather they made comments on what it should cover:

- 2.12. Invest in all social housing stock to ensure suitable and flexible for housing needs
- 2.13. Consider changing family homes to provide house shares, one suggestion to meet the adaptations required to meet Welfare Reforms.
- 2.14. Disabled Facilities Grants should be made available across all tenures so that adaptations are fair and equitable. Currently not allowing adaptations over £5,000.
- 2.15. Again SARTH needs to be considered to make sure the register is accessible. Includes examining the care model SPA (Single Point of Access)
- 2.16. Should consider decommissioning some of the older Sheltered Stock, built in the 1970s and unsuitable for the demographic and aspirational shift amongst older residents.
- 2.17. Should ensure compliance with existing sheltered schemes i.e. mandatory licencing.

Theme 2: **Consolidation:**

To build on the successes achieved, and to protect and improve the assets the County already has

Objective 2.2.

“Working with the Private Rented Sector to help landlords and tenants”

Attendees had no comments on the use of the Objective itself. Rather they made comments on what it should cover:

- 2.18. With regards to finance affordable loans should be made available for the private sector to improve the stock, including those with mortgages to make more of the stock and to help those struggling with payments (mortgage rescue)
- 2.19. This may require moving from a grants to a loans model.
- 2.20. More Homebuy and part owned schemes.
- 2.21. More support for landlords to encourage them to take on tenants.
- 2.22. Provide support and advice to landlords
- 2.23. More effective regulation
- 2.24. Strengthen landlord forums
- 2.25. Regional support for landlords
- 2.26. Hold seminars to inform private landlords about current policies and available grants
- 2.27. Change the perception that ‘DSS’ and young people don’t pay their rent.
- 2.28. Create mutually beneficial engagement in the private rented sector, including incentives.
- 2.29. Work with landlords to make them more aware of vulnerable groups and dispels any myths around particular client groups e.g. mental health.

Comments relating to DFG were repeated here from other sheets. Some of these comments were expanded to include:

- 2.30. Housing register should include adapted properties for matching people up to properties.
- 2.31. Work closer with social services in these cases.
- 2.32. Encourage private individuals to Buy to Rent specialised housing.

Theme 2: **Consolidation:**

To build on the successes achieved, and to protect and improve the assets the County already has

Objective 2.3.

“Ensuring effective leadership and partnership in delivering Specialised Services”

Attendees had no comments on the use of the Objective itself. Rather they made comments on what it should cover:

- 2.33. Better internal communication in the Council to prioritise specialist services needed.
- 2.34. Needs to be clear in the strategy.
- 2.35. Collecting data with partners to anticipate future needs
- 2.36. Remembering that one solution does not fit all.
- 2.37. Right people with appropriate level of responsibility around the table.
- 2.38. Use success stories to develop schemes
- 2.39. Include development experts at the start
- 2.40. Address gypsy and traveller needs

Housing Strategy Theme 3:

Construction:

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

Attendees had no comments on the use of the Theme itself. Rather they made comments on what it should cover:

- 3.1. All homes should be covered
- 3.2. Need wheelchair accessible family homes
- 3.3. Need to consider equality in construction, needs of most severely disabled for example.
- 3.4. Additional 1 bedroom properties to redress the imbalance.
- 3.5. Done in consultation with tenant and residents' groups.
- 3.6. Layout of new homes could help foster an environment with a strong 'community spirit'
- 3.7. Local Development Plan allocated land for housing based on market need and demand. Work with planning in the preparation of the annual housing land availability survey to consider bringing sites forward.
- 3.8. Where are the links to planning policy and the Local Development Plan?
- 3.9. Ensure the diverse needs of the whole county are taken into account
- 3.10. Recognise impact of large developments on rural communities.

Theme 3: **Construction:**

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

Objective 3.1.

“Building new homes to meet recognised need and demand”

Attendees had no comments on the use of the objective itself. Rather they made comments on what it should cover:

- 3.11. How far can you forecast need?
- 3.12. Build lifetime homes
- 3.13. No good just building homes with level access and downstairs toilets if property does not also have wheelchair access.
- 3.14. Small adaptations that allow people with disabilities to access flats, e.g. first floor.
- 3.15. Look at adapting and retrofitting properties rather than just building new ones.
- 3.16. Think about the outside environment
- 3.17. Ensure the quality, location, type lead to a pride in living in Denbighshire
- 3.18. Ensure planning policies allow this
- 3.19. Use the Adopted LDP with regards to allocated land.
- 3.20. Meet the demand for single person accommodation
- 3.21. Adaptation of large properties to excellent quality shared housing like the John Street example in Rhyl.
- 3.22. Welfare Reforms suggest the need for smaller properties.

Theme 3: **Construction:**

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

Objective 3.2.

“Seeking out new Innovations in investment and regeneration opportunities”

Attendees had no comments on the use of the objective itself. Rather they made comments on what it should cover:

- 3.23. Develop only affordable housing
- 3.24. Include ‘community’ in ‘new build’
- 3.25. Investigate and promote self build housing/work/sustainability
- 3.26. Shrinking town centres and the impact on housing on the periphery.
- 3.27. Priorities hard to deliver housing sites or regeneration sites. Mixed town centres could be housing sites?
- 3.28. Town centres will contract. Utilise empty shops (many originally homes) for new homes
- 3.29. Using brownfield sites and living over shops.
- 3.30. Empty homes is a great idea, could be developed for disabled people, people with mental health issues as secure tenure properties.
- 3.31. Tenure neutral supported housing schemes with options to Buy to Rent
- 3.32. Guardianship Scheme.

Theme 3: **Construction:**

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

Objective 3.3.

“Ensuring housing policy helps drive the local and regional economy”

Attendees had no comments on the use of the objective itself. Rather they made comments on what it should cover:

- 3.33. Relaxation in Welsh Government Development Quality Requirements so what is the priority? Houses for people!
- 3.34. Changes on building regulations will impact on the viability of projects thus less buildings in Wales
- 3.35. Need to be able to measure these innovations
- 3.36. Improved housing could drive well being and the economy.
- 3.37. Involve residents and look at what has worked elsewhere.
www.denbighshirehousing.co.uk
- 3.38. Build in social clauses to building contracts to keep it local
- 3.39. Should look to only use locally approved contractors
- 3.40. Encourage self build and link to college courses and apprenticeships

Housing Strategy:

What else should we add?

Housing Strategy

- 4.1. Housing waiting list: Only have one or two application forms and easy to understand criteria to get on to the list
- 4.2. Strategy should reflect what is and could happen on the ground. Needs to be achievable and not just a paper exercise.
- 4.3. Timely reviews 'are we on track'
- 4.4. Private sector rents top up.

Who should we be talking to?

- 4.5. Social services
- 4.6. Residents
- 4.7. Comparative English counties that have been successful
- 4.8. Supporting People
- 4.9. Shelter Cymru
- 4.10. Occupational Therapists
- 4.11. Private Sector
- 4.12. Neighbouring authorities
- 4.13. NWREN
- 4.14. "Everyone"
- 4.15. RICS Wales
- 4.16. Potential New developers
- 4.17. Specialist Housing Group (though this needs to have a re-jig of its membership so that higher level staff attend).
- 4.18. Anyone on the supply and demand chain in Denbighshire
- 4.19. Social service client groups
- 4.20. Housing professionals
- 4.21. Voluntary groups, 3rd Sector
- 4.22. Young people leaving care (via Barnardo's)
- 4.23. Homeless services and organisations
- 4.24. Mental health services