

# 4. HOUSING

## 4.1 Introduction and background

**Housing services are currently primarily the responsibility of district councils which act as ‘housing enablers’ and have duties to satisfy in relation to identifying and responding to housing needs, facilitating housing renewal and regeneration and directing housing strategy and development. Housing services currently delivered or commissioned by the district councils include:**

- Housing strategy and development
- Access to social housing
- Advice for tenants, landlords, homeowners and homeless people including housing standards; shared ownership, property condition, grants for energy efficiency, supported living
- Grants and financial assistance for adaptations to disabled people’s homes, essential works of repairs and home security

In addition where districts have retained housing stock there are activities including:

- Resident involvement
- Long-term management of the housing stock, including replacement
- Repair and maintenance



- Estate management
- Housing income management

There is a unique relationship between the tenant, the Council and the housing provider whether it is the Council, a Housing Association or an Arms Lengths Management Organisation (ALMO) as the tenant has a legal right to be involved and consulted on all key decisions affecting them. Careful consideration needs to be given to the public perception of social housing.

Services provided by the 6 councils vary depending on whether the landlord function remains with the district council. Penwith and Kerrier District Council and Restormel Borough Council have completed the voluntary transfer of ownership and management of their housing stock to registered social landlords. North Cornwall and Caradon District Councils retain their own housing stocks and therefore have a responsibility to provide housing management services to 3000 homes each. North Cornwall Council tenants recently voted overwhelmingly to stay with the Council. Carrick District Council has established an arms length management organisation (ALMO) which has taken on the landlord function for their 3000 homes. The success of right-to-buy schemes can lead to concerns over the sustainability of the remaining housing stock due to depletion and difficulties in replacing stock.

Whilst all six districts share the same housing enabling duties, their departmental structures vary, some demonstrating integration with other services such as environmental health, others standing alone.

Cornwall's Supporting People programme is administered by the County Council. This programme commissions housing related support services for vulnerable young people and adults including older people, people with disabilities, homeless people,

people leaving secure accommodation or prison, people suffering from domestic violence, young people leaving care, and people with mental health and/or drugs or alcohol problems.

### **Opportunities for improvement**

The implementation of a housing service for a single council will need very careful consideration and where appropriate will need the involvement of tenants, to ensure that:

- opportunities are maximised;
- best practice identified and followed;
- local needs met; and
- existing tenants not disadvantaged.

In the long term it will yield improvements in outcomes for local people, including the housing related targets in the LAA as well as achieve a variety of organisational efficiencies and improvements in service delivery. These improvements encapsulate:

## **4.2 Housing Strategy, Renewal and Development**

There is a need to align housing and planning strategies at both a countywide and local level, to ensure that sufficient housing stock is available so that local housing need is met locally at a Community Network level or below. This will reduce the need for people to have to move from one community to another to meet their housing need, and reduce the possibility of large groups with particular needs congregating in one community.

## Part Two: **Achieving our aims and objectives**



a strong sustainable community for one and all

A countywide approach to affordable housing provision is vital supported by consistent use of the second homes council tax income to support development of brown field sites into affordable housing.

The approach and delivery model of strategy and development duties currently varies across the districts. A single council will allow for adequate resources to be put towards a dedicated strategy and development function. For example it is difficult

to provide Lifetime Homes for people with specific housing needs. At present economies of scale mean that small bids for the development of Lifetimes Homes are unattractive. A countywide bid is more likely to be successful. A co-ordinated council could also take forward initiatives such as withdrawal from the housing subsidy system, as Carrick's ALMO is currently pursuing which greatly increases the ability to replace housing as it is sold off under 'right-to-buy' schemes.

Additionally the council could implement a consistent approach to implementing the Decent Homes standard and monitoring compliance and the Council could build on current best practice to form local integrated teams to improve delivery.

There will be additional benefits to a countywide service that include the opportunity to collate countywide information and data on housing needs and choices, and the ability to predict trends and respond at Community Network and strategic level across Cornwall. There will also be an opportunity for improved partnership working with housing providers, including registered social landlords, private landlords and housing developers, local councillors and tenants at both a Community Network and strategic level.

### 4.3 Housing Management

Where housing management has been retained, it is recognised that this service must continue to be delivered at the local level building on best practice, particularly in relation to tenant involvement, where for example Carrick currently have a 3\* rated ALMO with Beacon status for tenant involvement. However there are advantages and potential improvements which can be achieved, building on current best practice under a co-ordinated system, including:

- Careful development of long term asset management plans that maximise proactive maintenance and minimise reactive maintenance of property
- Release of resources to provide consistent expert and specialist functions e.g. money/debt advice; citizenship rights and responsibilities, enforcing tenancy conditions; domestic violence advisers; anti-social behaviour advisers

- Co-ordination of day to day operations such as rent collection, repairs reporting, general enquiries and out of hours emergencies
- Improved access to housing stock will give more choice and control to tenants and prospective tenants, but this needs balancing with the need to reduce displacement from one community to another
- Co-ordinated approach to enforcement and access to additional resources such as legal services to facilitate effective and timely enforcement action
- Introducing standard criteria for improvement grants and Disabled Facilities Grants, leading to improved access to these limited resources

There may be some opportunities in relation to the procurement of repairs and maintenance.

### 4.4 Housing Needs

Prevention of homelessness will improve through a countywide, co-ordinated approach to interpretation of homelessness legislation. Definitions and interpretation of 'local connection' criteria will need very careful consideration.

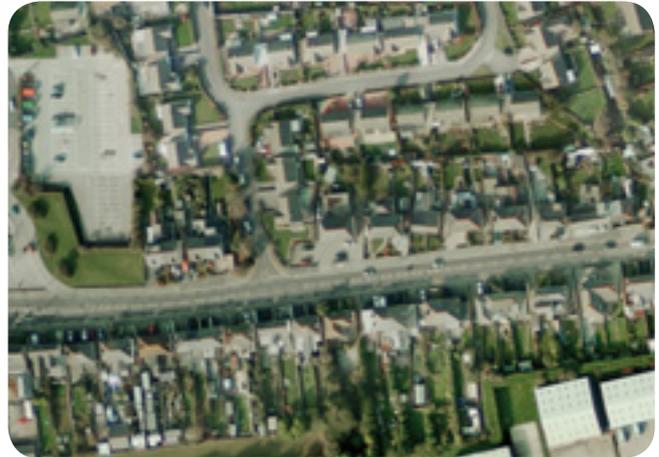
A co-ordinated approach to homelessness services will tackle confusion in access. This is particularly important where there are vulnerable members of the household such as children or others who may have a complexity of other needs such as education, physical or learning disabilities, other health or social care needs or housing support requirements. It will allow housing needs decisions to be made, having taking into full account the need and impact on issues such as schooling.

## 4.5 Affordable Housing and move-on accommodation

An integrated approach to tackling the shortfall in affordable housing by extending best practice across the county, will seek to increase the provision of affordable housing within Cornwall. This will be of particular benefit to those people who are seeking greater independence and/or are trapped in institutional accommodation or family settings such as care leavers, people with mental health problems in residential care, adults with learning disability seeking independent supported living environment, people leaving the criminal justice system, people leaving successful substance misuse rehabilitation programmes and victims of domestic violence ready to leave refuge.

## 4.6 Choice based lettings

There is an opportunity to improve customer access to housing opportunities across the county by adopting a choice-based lettings system which operates through a common housing register, that reduces displacement from one community to another, as already four out of the six districts currently operate choice-based lettings. In addition, each district currently operates its own 'local connection' criteria which must be satisfied before someone is accepted onto the local housing register. A co-ordinated approach would facilitate the development of a common housing register, operating choice-based lettings at a Community Network level and allowing appropriate 'local connection' policies to be established which are appropriate at both Community Network level and a county level. This would give real choice to those people who wish to remain within in



their local community network area or want to move to a particular area for social or economic reasons.

## 4.7 Tenant Involvement

There are many good examples of tenant involvement which demonstrate that it is best undertaken at the local, Community Network level. Efficiencies will be achieved by economies in administration, consultation and information activities.

## 4.8 Integration with adult social care services

In some fields there is a rationale for the integration of some elements of housing and adult social care services. This is based on the fact that for some vulnerable people, accommodation and care needs are highly interrelated. There are already large areas of joint working in place, from strategic planning to service delivery. Integration will yield better outcomes for vulnerable people and achieve better organisational effectiveness.