

Strategic Housing Service

North Tyneside Council

September 2010



Contents

Local Authority Housing Inspections	3
Summary	4
Scoring the service	6
Recommendations	9
Report	11
Appendix 1 – Performance indicators	46
Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken	49
Appendix 3 – Positive practice	50

Local Authority Housing Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high-quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing.

This inspection has been carried out by the Housing Inspectorate using powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. To meet these principles this inspection:

- is proportionate to risk and the performance of the Council;
- judges the quality of the service for service users and the value for money of the service;
- promotes further improvements in the service; and
- has cost no more than is necessary to safeguard the public interest.

Summary

- 1 North Tyneside Council provides a fair strategic housing service that has promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 The Council has a clear vision for housing. Its strategic approach is closely linked to wider social and economic issues. A robust housing strategy is up-to-date and is underpinned by comprehensive supporting strategies. Planning policy is strong and supports new housing development and regeneration. A robust understanding of local and sub-regional housing markets is used to inform appropriate strategies. Knowledge is used to target action to meet key priorities such as energy efficiency. Strong leadership promotes housing and tackles opposition to local schemes.
- 3 Effective internal and external partnership working, both locally and sub-regionally, improves services. Regional targets to build new homes have been exceeded, and the number of affordable homes built in the last two years has significantly increased. Homes are built to high standards. Effective action has minimised the impact of the recession on new housing schemes and prevented homelessness. Most social rented homes meet the decent homes standard and the energy efficiency of homes is improving. Neighbourhoods are improved through successful regeneration work, and resident satisfaction is increasing. People in housing need receive suitable advice and have access to a range of housing options. Effective action is increasing homelessness prevention and helps vulnerable people to live independently in their homes.
- 4 A number of areas require further improvement. Strategic housing services are not yet integrated with health services, and some partners are not fully engaged. The Council lacks a robust understanding of the diverse housing needs of local people and cannot be sure that the services it provides are meeting the needs of all members of the community. Community engagement is developing but is not yet effective. It is not always easy to access council services. The condition of private sector homes is not significantly improving. Performance on developing affordable homes that are below market level costs is weakⁱ.
- 5 Services are likely to continue to improve. The Council has a positive recent track record in improving most strategic housing services. Teams are supported to work together more effectively, and have the skills and capacity to deliver strategic objectives. Effective sub-regional and local partnerships increase capacity. Plans and strategies are integrated and strong performance management ensures that targets are met. Financial and risk management is satisfactory and there is a strong track record of making efficiency savings. Significant external funding increases resources.

ⁱ Intermediate affordable housing is housing at prices and rents above those of social rent but below market price or rents (Communities and Local Government)

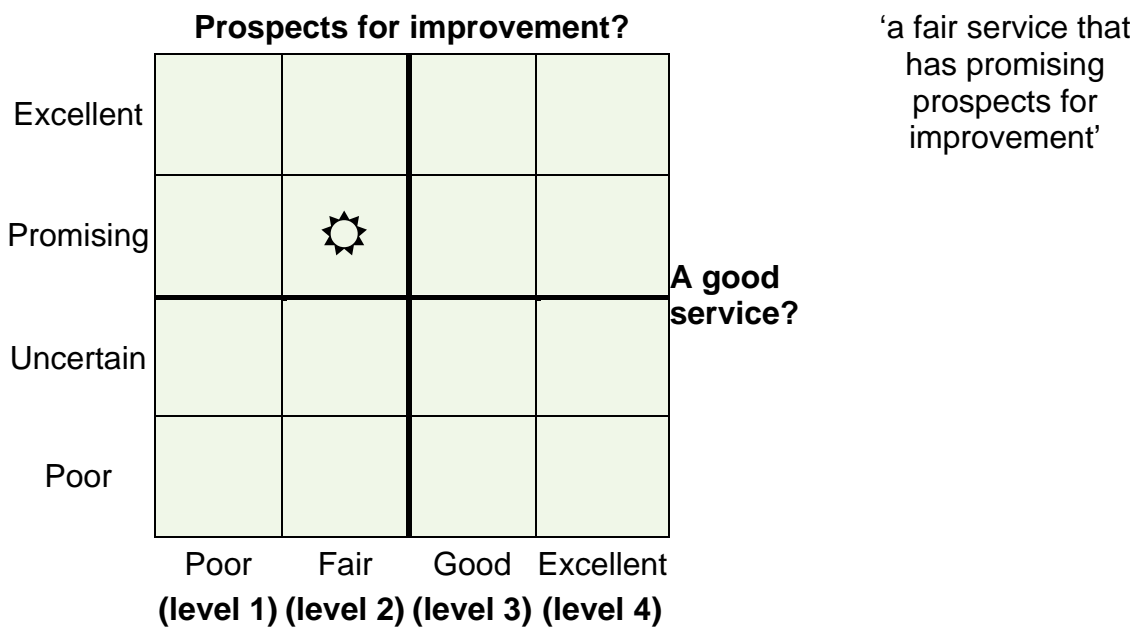
Summary

- 6 There are some barriers to improvement. The track record on improving some services such as community engagement is recent. Communication is not effectively keeping partners informed. Plans lack measurable targets and outcomes, and the impact of projects is not routinely evaluated. Benchmarking and learning from others is not effective. A value for money culture is not embedded and the Council lacks a robust understanding of its strategic housing costs and how this compares with top performers.

Scoring the service

7 We have assessed North Tyneside Council as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chartⁱ



Source: Audit Commission

- 8 We found the service to be fair because it has a range of strengths including:
- a clear vision for housing is based on a firm understanding of the challenges faced in balancing housing markets, and is linked to wider social and economic issues;
 - a robust housing strategy is kept up-to-date and is underpinned by a range of comprehensive supporting strategies;
 - positive leadership promotes the housing vision and tackles opposition to strategic objectives;
 - strong internal and external partnership working, both locally and sub-regionally, supports the delivery of strategic housing objectives;
 - a comprehensive understanding of housing markets is kept up-to-date and is used to inform appropriate strategies;

ⁱ The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

Scoring the service

- a reasonable understanding of private sector house condition is complemented by detailed research, such as thermal imaging. Information is used to target action to meet energy efficiency and affordable warmth objectives;
 - planning policy is strong and supports the delivery of new housing and regeneration objectives;
 - regional targets to build new homes have been exceeded, the poor track record on building affordable homes is being addressed, and homes are built to high and increasingly sustainable standards;
 - positive action has helped to minimise the impact of the economic downturn on the housing market and vulnerable people;
 - neighbourhoods are improving through successful regeneration work, reducing the high number of long-term empty homes, and resident satisfaction is improving;
 - most social rented homes meet the decent homes standard and the energy efficiency of homes is improving;
 - people in housing need receive suitable advice and support, and have access to a range of housing options through the choice-based letting system;
 - performance on preventing homelessness is positive and the use of temporary accommodation is minimised; and
 - a range of supported housing and adaptations help vulnerable people to live more independently in their homes.
- 9 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:
- lacking a robust understanding of diverse housing needs and strategic objectives to meet unmet needs;
 - the use of Equality Impact Assessments is weak;
 - emergency accommodation for people experiencing domestic violence is not yet effective but plans are in place to address this;
 - it is not always easy to access council services;
 - work to integrate the strategic approach to housing with health services is underdeveloped, and some partners are not effectively engaged;
 - engagement with community groups and private landlords is developing but is not yet effective;
 - a strategic approach to making neighbourhoods and new homes more sustainable is underdeveloped;
 - the condition of private sector homes is not significantly improving, performance in licensing houses in multiple occupation is weak, and strategies are not effectively targeting improving the poor condition of vulnerable households' homes in all parts of the Borough; and
 - performance on providing a range of new homes below market costs and addressing under-occupation in existing homes is weak.

10 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- there is a positive recent track record of improving most services to meet strategic housing objectives;
- human resource planning and training is satisfactory, teams work effectively together, and have the skills and experience to deliver strategic objectives;
- effective sub-regional and local partnerships boost resources and capacity;
- ICT systems support strategic development and the delivery of objectives;
- housing objectives and targets are well integrated through the Local Area Agreement and Sustainable Community Strategy to supporting strategies and plans;
- performance management is effective with action taken to address under-performance;
- political tensions are managed to minimise disruption to delivering strategic housing objectives;
- financial and risk management is satisfactory, there is a strong track record of making efficiency savings, and a strong corporate framework procures services; and
- significant external funding increases resources and council assets are used to facilitate new development.

11 However, there are a number of barriers to improvement. These include:

- the track record of improving some key services including community engagement, identifying and addressing diverse housing needs is more recent or is just developing;
- external communication is not yet effective in keeping partners fully informed;
- plans and strategies lack measurable targets and outcomes, and the impact of projects is not routinely evaluated and reported;
- benchmarking and learning from others is piecemeal and is not yet effective; and
- a strategic approach to improving value for money is not embedded and the Council lacks a robust understanding of its strategic housing costs, the relationship with quality and how this compares with top performers.

Recommendations

12 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costsⁱ and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council shares the findings of this report with residents and councillors; and takes action to address all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Improve the strategic approach to housing by:

- ensuring that the vision, objectives and actions are closely integrated with local and sub-regional health authority objectives;
- ensuring that a strategic framework gives the opportunity for community groups, all partners and stakeholders to be effectively engaged at all stages in developing, determining and delivering strategic housing objectives;
- ensuring that strategic objectives reflect and are shaped by those of partner organisations;
- developing the strategic approach to improving:
 - private house conditions;
 - a range of intermediate housing;
 - the sustainability of new and existing housing;
 - the approach to under-occupation;
 - and ensuring that the diverse housing and support needs of local communities are identified and met;
- implementing a robust approach to Equality Impact Assessments; and
- developing effective mechanisms to share housing intelligence with partners.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a comprehensive approach to all elements of the housing strategy, in particular the needs of diverse groups;
- more effective and joined-up services with partners, particularly the health authority, and better use of resources; and
- all aspects of housing strategy development are fully informed by partners.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by July 2011.

ⁱ Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

R2 Improve outcomes from strategic housing services by:

- developing relationships with private sector landlords to provide a wide range of integrated services with the Council and partners, and secure the improvement of private homes including houses in multiple occupation (HMOs);
- ensuring that customers understand how good housing support services are;
- ensuring that private sector loans assistance, equity release schemes and renovation grants maximise improvement to the condition of private sector homes, and further reduce the number of empty homes; and
- reviewing and improving corporate services to improve customers' experience when contacting the Council for advice and assistance.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved private sector homes and better use of housing stock to meet needs; and
- easier customer access to high quality services.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by April 2011.

Recommendation

R3 Develop the capacity to improve services by:

- ensuring that plans and strategies have measurable targets and outcomes, and that projects and schemes are routinely evaluated to measure their impact; and
- improving benchmarking to ensure a comprehensive assessment of value for money, and using learning to further improve strategic housing services.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the success of strategic objectives is measured and promoted; and
- better value for money, and improved capacity and resources.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by July 2011.

We would like to thank the staff of North Tyneside Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of Inspection: 24 May to 28 May 2010

Report

Context

The locality

- 13** North Tyneside is in the North-East of England, situated within the metropolitan county of Tyne and Wear along with South Tyneside, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Gateshead and Sunderland. The area is relatively small, covering 82 square kilometres. There are good rail links to other parts of the North-East through the Metro light rail service, and the East Coast mainline. The A19 trunk road provides links to the north and south. The main towns in North Tyneside are Wallsend, North Shields, Whitley Bay and Killingworth.
- 14** The population of North Tyneside is 196,000 which has grown in the last ten years as new jobs and housing has brought people to the area. It is projected to rise to 225,000 by 2031 (15.6 per cent). The population is ageing, with a projected 51 per cent increase in the number of people aged 65 years or more. By 2031 it is expected that this age group will comprise 23 per cent of the population, with implications for housing, health and social care policy and provision. Less than 6 per cent of the population are from BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities. It is estimated that over 27,000 of households in the Borough contain one or more people with a disability and 11.9 per cent of these household have an outstanding support need. Ten per cent of all homes are already adapted.
- 15** The local economy used to be made up of traditional industries like shipbuilding and coalmining. Now, the major sources of employment are from the manufacturing, shops and wholesale, finance and call centre sectors, with a large number of public sector jobs. North Tyneside has an employment rate of 75.2 per cent, compared with 71.6 per cent for the North-East and 74.4 per cent for England (ONS Neighbourhood Statistics - Worklessness). Earnings by residence for 2009 show North Tyneside achieving a gross weekly pay of £449, which is slightly above the North East rate of £439 but below the Great Britain rate of £491 (Nomis Labour Supply). North Tyneside is ranked the 102nd most deprived area out of 354 Local Authority districts. This is an improvement from 2004 when it was the 80th most deprived district.
- 16** The level of owner occupation in North Tyneside is the same as the national average at 69 per cent. Social housing makes up 23 per cent of the housing stock, with the remaining 8 per cent of stock being private rented housing. Average house prices across North Tyneside are greater than the metropolitan county and regional averages, but are below the national average. Homes are not affordable to people on low incomes. The house price to earnings ratio in North Tyneside is currently 5.6:1 – based on a single income. In 2008, the average price was £146,413 compared to £144,606 for Tyne and Wear, £141,674 for the North-East and £220,310 for England. The scale of under-occupation at 37 per cent of all households is high.

The Council and the service

- 17 North Tyneside Council is made up of 60 councillors. The Council has an elected Mayor (Conservative) and Cabinet system of governance. Cabinet members are appointed by the Mayor. Following the 2009 local elections the Labour party have 29 members, with 24 Conservatives and 7 Liberal Democrats.
- 18 The Audit Commission judged that North Tyneside Council performs adequately in its 2009 organisational assessment. North Tyneside is an improving Council. It has improved significantly since 2003 when it was rated one of the worst in the country.
- 19 The Council employs over 6,000 people. The Housing Strategy Team has 11 staff and sits within the Development Directorate. This directorate includes Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration Services. The Council manages its 15,619 council homes through North Tyneside Homes. Adult Social Care, Supporting People and North Tyneside Homes sit within the Community Services Directorate.

Vision and strategic approach - How effectively do the Council and its partners strategically plan work to balance the housing market and develop sustainable communities?

Is there an overarching and shared vision for housing which links to wider ambitions for the community and is championed?

- 20 North Tyneside Council is performing adequately in this area of work. The challenges faced in balancing housing markets are well understood and a clear vision for housing is linked to wider social and economic issues. Links to health services are not as clear. The Council has given positive leadership in delivering the housing vision. Partners have a reasonable understanding of the overall vision for housing. The vision for housing does not demonstrate how the diverse needs of the community will be met.
- 21 North Tyneside Council has a clear understanding of the challenges it faces in balancing the local and sub-regional housing markets. The vision for housing to 2030 in the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) is challenging:
 - 'a variety of housing to suit peoples' needs is available and affordable. No one has to leave the borough to find suitable accommodation'.***
- 22 The Council and the North Tyneside Strategic Partnership (NTSP) understand the links between housing, transport, health, social and economic development. Partners generally share the vision and objectives to provide an integrated approach to place shaping in North Tyneside. The SCS includes a firm commitment to equality and diversity, improving the health of people, regenerating neighbourhoods and addressing climate change. A refresh of the SCS provides a road map for delivery until 2013 and is due for approval in June 2010. The refresh is based on a robust examination of the national, regional and local context, including the impact of the recession. The vision and priorities for housing are key to delivering sustainable communities.

Report

- 23 The SCS demonstrates a firm commitment to improving housing and includes a wide range of key short and medium-term actions. Delivery of new affordable housing is a key priority for the Council. It includes key National Indicators in the Local Area Agreement (LAA)ⁱ. Key housing objectives are covered in the Council Plan 2008 to 2012. The SCS refresh envisages much lower levels of future house building and recognises the need for more executive homes to support economic development and deliver more balanced housing markets. It addresses the need for decent and energy efficient homes, and recognises the challenge of meeting the needs of an increasingly elderly population, and the need for housing support. Overall, good quality housing is recognised as key to creating sustainable communities.
- 24 LAA targets are well linked to achieving the housing vision. A number of key housing indicators, including new and affordable homes, decent homes, households in temporary accommodation, tackling fuel poverty, vulnerable people supported to maintain independent living, have been adopted from the Government's National Performance Indicator set. The Council closely monitors and compares performance to other councils. Targets for house building have been revised for 2010/11 to reflect the economic downturn, the gross number of new homes has been reduced from 586 to 280. Targets are generally ambitious and reflect strategic housing objectives.
- 25 The overall housing vision and objectives reflects overall community priorities. Community priorities are identified through resident surveys and housing needs surveys. This has led to a focus on regeneration. The community places the need for decent, affordable housing as a high priority, but place a lower priority on the need to address this. The Council ensures that community priorities are addressed in its vision and strategies. As a result the Council prioritises addressing poor housing and tackling antisocial behaviour to make neighbourhoods better places to live.
- 26 Senior officers and councillors from all political parties steer and champion housing priorities. The planning committee supports developments in line with strategic objectives and champions the delivery of affordable housing and other priorities. This includes developing a refuge for women experiencing domestic violence. Members champion regeneration in areas such as Battle Hill and have successfully challenged opposition to demolition plans.
- 27 The Council has championed redeveloping non-traditionally built homes and building supported housing schemes for vulnerable people. It tackled opposition to a development supporting young people back into society. Despite political changes, lack of consensus and tension between political parties, councillors from all parties have generally supported key housing priorities. Taking difficult decisions helps to deliver the housing vision and supports vulnerable households.

ⁱ In May 2010 the Government announced plans to abolish comprehensive area assessments (CAA) and national indicators

- 28 The sub-regional approach to developing a strong vision for housing is satisfactory. North Tyneside helps to drive a strategic approach to housing with both the regional housing strategy and the Tyne and Wear sub-regional housing strategy. Planning policies are closely integrated with the vision for housing in the Regional Spatial Strategy (now ended). The delivery of new homes has supported North Tyneside's successful bid for growth point status.
- 29 Although the Council works closely with external partners it is not always clear how local and sub-regional partners have contributed to shaping the housing vision. Strategic partners have a reasonable understanding about what the housing vision aims to achieve. However, some partners (including private landlords and some housing associations) are not clear about how they contribute to delivering strategic housing objectives.
- 30 The Council's vision for housing is not yet fully integrated with the Primary Care Trust's (PCT) vision for health. Positively, the links between housing and health are understood, and there is joint commitment to improve integration through the joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA), joint working at the Supporting People Commissioning Body, the refresh of the SCS and reviewing the housing strategy. Until a strategic vision is fully shared with partners the Council is not ensuring that all partners are working together to deliver shared local and sub-regional objectives.
- 31 The vision for housing is not explicit about the choice and range of housing options for disadvantaged households. Sub-regional work has informed the approach to meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, and although the Council lacks a specific older persons' strategy it does have a clear approach to meeting the housing needs of older people through the Quality Homes for Older People initiative. The vision and strategies to meet the needs of other groups such as black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and the lesbian and gay community is underdeveloped. The Council is at an early stage in routinely engaging with other diverse groups to ensure that their housing needs are addressed in its overall vision.
- 32 The vision for private sector housing is underdeveloped. Although the vision is implicit in aiming for good quality homes, the SCS and LAA lack clarity about how this will be achieved. For example, there are no overall targets to reduce the percentage of vulnerable households in non-decent homes. There is less direction to drive improvement within private sector housing.

Are all key stakeholders, partners and the wider community actively engaged in shaping the strategic approach to housing?

- 33 The Council is performing adequately in this area of work. Engagement with local and sub-regional partners, the North Tyneside Strategic Partnership (NTSP) and national agencies is generally strong. Partnership working is effective, built on mutual trust, and helps to deliver strategic objectives. Engagement with community groups and disadvantaged groups is developing but is not yet effective. Some voluntary partners do not feel they are shaping supported housing strategies.

Report

- 34** The Council is committed to working with partners to deliver its housing vision and strategic objectives. Partners on the NTSP shape the overall vision for North Tyneside through the SCS. Partners, the community and voluntary sector, and local businesses were consulted through area events. The NTSP executive steers delivery of the SCS through five themed partnerships. The enterprise and regeneration theme partnership covers most housing related objectives. This ensures that housing strategy is integrated with broader infrastructure and regeneration requirements.
- 35** Generally strong sub-regional partnerships, such as the Tyne and Wear Housing Partnership, help to deliver strategic housing objectives. This includes developing the local choice-based lettings (CBL) scheme. A sub-regional scheme will involve 12 housing associations and private landlords as well as local authorities. Other sub-regional initiatives include developing a strategy for Gypsies and Travellers, and a regional loans fund to help people invest in, and improve private sector property.
- 36** The Council jointly procured a Tyne and Wear Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and the sub-regional housing strategy helped to secure £3.45 million funding for regional objectives. This included Battle Hill regeneration and additional Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding. Partnerships coordinate work to help balance housing markets over a wider area, making better use of resources.
- 37** Although partners are positive about working with North Tyneside, some sub-regional partnerships are not yet fully effective. Links between North Tyneside's growth point and other growth points in the region are not fully developed. Competition between Tyne and Wear authorities can limit the coordinated delivery of new housing development across the sub-region. This means that partners, such as house builders prefer to work with authorities such as North Tyneside, where relationships are more effective.
- 38** The Council works closely with regional and national agencies. Close engagement with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) helps to coordinate national housing policy to deliver local priorities. This includes providing more affordable homes and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to remodel sheltered housing. Joint working with adult social services and the PCT provides a strategic approach to improving sheltered housing and provide new extra care provision. This approach is tackling issues of under occupation in some, less popular, sheltered housing schemes; improving living standards in popular sheltered housing; and giving more housing choices for older people, while reducing admissions to high cost residential care or hospital.
- 39** A clear framework allows key strategic partners to shape the Council's approach to strategic housing. Partners are involved at an early stage through the Housing Market Partnership (HMP). The HMP includes estate agents, landlords, the House Builders' Federation, National Federation of Housing Association representative, housing associations, Government Office North East, the HCA and neighbouring authorities. All partners were consulted on the emerging priorities for the new housing strategy. More partners are more closely involved with service specific groups and developing individual projects. Feedback from partners on the emerging priorities is currently being collated and analysed to inform the new housing strategy. Partner feedback is shaping emerging priorities to develop town centres, re-use empty shops and improve the adaptations service.

- 40 Partnerships with house builders, developers and housing associations are exceptionally strong. Partners are listened to, and are willing to challenge the Council. Feedback and reviewing market intelligence, informed the Council's decision to reduce the affordable homes target to 25 per cent (from 30 per cent). A flexible and pragmatic approach to planning policies makes sites more viable. Developers and house builders compare this true partnering approach favourably with other authorities they work with. This approach makes strategies and policies more robust and achievable.
- 41 Partnerships are effective in maximising funding and coordinating the successful delivery of strategic objectives. Partners work together to regenerate neighbourhoods. The strategic housing team works with partners to develop Supporting People services for vulnerable people across the Borough. Partnerships help to mitigate the impact of the economic downturn. The Council works with house builders, housing associations and the HCA to develop new homes. It has secured 'Kickstart'ⁱ and 'Homebuy Direct' National Affordable Homes Programme (NAHP) funding to deliver more affordable housing and transfer unoccupied market housing to affordable housing, such as at Balliol College Farm, Longbenton. Effective joint working helps to secure Single Housing Investment Pot (SHIP) funding, regeneration funding, and the regional financial assistance scheme.
- 42 Effective internal joint working between planning, housing and valuation staff supports the delivery of new homes. Housing Strategy, planning and other staff meet regularly and share information about performance data, section 106 requirements, land supply, research studies and intelligence from the strategic housing land availability assessment (SHLAA) and the SHMA. Council officers work together to support developers through pre-application procedures. Joint working speeds-up the development process and reduces the risk of failed planning applications.
- 43 Partnerships with private landlords are positive, but are still developing. The Council works with 320 registered private landlords through a landlord's forum. The Council's Chief Executive visited the landlord's forum and discussed their role in the emerging priorities for the housing strategy. The Council works with private landlords, housing associations and North Tyneside Homes to make best use of existing homes, such as through the deposit guarantee scheme (DGS). The landlord forum improves cooperation between landlords. For example, landlords train each other and share knowledge. An accreditation scheme helps to drive up standards. They have direct access to housing benefit (HB) services through a surgery at the forum, a dedicated telephone number and email contacts. The landlord forum has helped to improve relations and prevent homelessness.
- 44 However, landlords still have a limited understanding of how they contribute to supporting the Council's strategic policies. They do not feel that strategies relate to their needs, and it is not clear how private landlords have informed housing strategies. Landlords are positive about the way information is shared through meetings, and support from housing and benefit staff at meetings. Positively, landlords are confident that the Council will listen to their feedback. Partnerships with landlords are not yet fully supporting the delivery of all strategic housing objectives.

ⁱ The Kickstart Housing Delivery programme is targeted at stalled sites. Funding is being reduced as part of public expenditure cuts in 2010.

- 45 Community engagement is developing but is not yet effective. Corporately the Council seeks the views of residents through specific workshops, surveys, road show, the website and four area forums. A service development group of 16 council tenants and applicants helped to set up the choice-based lettings (CBL) scheme and website. A survey of those who experienced domestic abuse and service providers informed the model for the proposed new Domestic Abuse Refuge.
- 46 However, engagement with the community about strategic housing issues is not embedded. There is piecemeal engagement over specific issues, but residents are not routinely engaged developing priorities, objectives and targets for the new housing strategy. The Council does not effectively engage with private sector tenants, apart from in a few areas where intensive work has been undertaken, such as at East Howdon.
- 47 Engagement with diverse groups is limited, with some positive work with older people but limited work with other groups. New links with the Bangladeshi and Polish communities are helping to make housing more accessible. The Council is currently mapping local communities to identify where it can engage with them more effectively. The Council will be taking the 'emerging issues' for the new housing strategy to the area forums in June 2010. Residents are not yet shaping specific housing objectives.
- 48 Some voluntary sector partners, including the homelessness prevention group, have had little opportunity to shape and support strategic housing priorities. The Council has used one-off surveys and the views of some partners – such as for example the crime and disorder and misuse of drugs partnership - to inform the development of the new housing strategy. A discussion document has been sent to partners, but they are not yet engaged in shaping and developing priorities. The Council recognises this and is reviewing their consultation process.. Unless all partners and stakeholders feel engaged the priority objectives in the new housing strategy may not reflect the wishes of some partners and some groups of residents, particularly those who are vulnerable.

Is there up-to-date information on the housing market and housing conditions and does wider socio-economic data inform the housing vision and related priorities?

- 49 The Council is performing adequately in this area of work. It has a detailed understanding of housing markets and uses up-to-date information to inform appropriate strategies. It uses information from a wide range of sources and commissions research to address gaps in its knowledge. However, North Tyneside Council lacks a robust understanding of diverse housing needs. Mechanisms to share housing market information with partners are underdeveloped.

- 50** The Council uses a thorough understanding of local and sub-regional housing markets to inform its strategic approach. The Tyne and Wear authorities jointly procured a regional Strategic Market Housing Assessment (SHMA) to provide a robust basis for understanding local and sub-regional housing needs. The North Tyneside SHMA identifies demand for executive housing in the Borough. It is currently being used to revise planning policies as part of Local Development Framework (LDF). The assessment included a housing needs survey which highlighted, for example, the needs of older people and people with disabilities. The SHMA identified the lack of potential to deliver intermediate rented housing in North Tyneside, due to inadequate cost margins between social and market rents. Local intelligence helped to inform the strategic approach to remodelling and extending housing choices for older people. This has led to the gradual replacement of outdated sheltered housing with new self contained homes, extra care accommodation and increasing support to help people live independently in their homes. Evidence shows a combined requirement for sheltered accommodation of 2,908 units and 11.9 per cent of households with someone with a disability have an outstanding support need. This helped to inform the plans to refurbish 16 existing sheltered schemes and replace the rest with 10 new blocks. Emerging priorities for the refreshed housing strategy will include ways to address the scale of under-occupation (37 per cent of all households). Robust intelligence helps to ensure that strategies focus on the right things.
- 51** A range of other research and sources of data are routinely used to increase the Council's housing market intelligence. The Council uses data from 'Homefinder' (the Choice Based Lettings system) and the North Tyneside Information Observatory to inform its strategies. Council tax records are used to help tackle empty homes. Information is recorded and analysed using for example GISⁱ technology.
- 52** The position statement supporting the SCS demonstrates a good understanding of housing markets and key challenges. It recognises the needs of the increasingly older population, the need for early intervention, support and advice to reduce homelessness - especially among young and other vulnerable people. It particularly identifies the need to strengthen strategic and operational activity in the private sector.
- 53** The Council understands that homes in North Tyneside are not affordable to people on low incomes. The house price to earnings ratio in North Tyneside is currently 5.6:1 (based on single income). It understands the increase in fuel poverty (from 27 per cent in 2007 to 32 per cent in December 2009) due to increase in fuel prices. Knowledge is used, for example, to prioritise building more affordable homes and improve the energy efficiency of homes.
- 54** However, work to make effective use of partners' intelligence is underdeveloped. The Council is not routinely sharing information with housing associations, health authorities, and neighbouring authorities to complement its own intelligence. This reduces the ability for partners to fully engage with the Council's strategic approach to housing, and to work together to identify a strategic direction that will secure solutions to shared problems.

ⁱ GIS – Geographical Information System

Report

- 55** The strategic housing land availability assessment (SHLAA) published in August 2009 is used with developers to ensure that North Tyneside has a five-year land supply to meet general and affordable housing needs. An affordable housing viability study (AHVS) was commissioned to test the future viability of sites. This helps to inform discussions with developers and ensures that proposals are realistic.
- 56** The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) between the Council and North Tyneside PCT informs future revisions of the SCS and housing strategy. It identifies, for example, a gap in housing related support for drug treatment users. It prioritises developing homeless prevention approaches such as financial assistance, mediation and priority banding for domestic violence, care leavers and asylum cases. Information has led to joint working, for example, the joint funded adaptations and loans services (ALES) helps to ensure 95 per cent of equipment and small adaptation are delivered within seven days.
- 57** The Council has a reasonable understanding about the condition of private sector housing. The Council used BREⁱ private sector housing projections to assess stock condition in 2009. The BRE stock model, together with additional surveys, provides an adequate guide to stock condition. It models English House Condition Survey data to take account of the health and housing safety rating system (HHSRS). North Tyneside has done some work to check its validity, and has supplemented information through the Warm Zoneⁱⁱ scheme (visiting every home) and aerial thermal imaging that provides an accurate assessment of heat loss from every house in the Borough.
- 58** The Council has been able to use data to target work at the worst housing. The Council is developing how projections are used and aims to direct a marketing campaign of the new financial assistance policy and the review of Home Improvement Agency (HIA) service. This approach helps to target resources and ensures that improvement work helps households that need it most.
- 59** The Council has a limited understanding of the diverse housing needs of its communities. It understands some needs, including the needs of older people, and it has a reasonable understanding of the needs of Gypsies and Travellers following the sub-regional accommodation assessment. This has led to a search area being identified along the A19 corridor in the core strategy consultation programme. The Council is currently undertaking further work to increase its knowledge through diversity mapping (first stage completed May 2010). Without this knowledge it cannot develop robust strategies to meet priority needs.
- 60** The Council does not know the profile of some of its strategic housing service customers (such as people accessing private sector grants and those making planning applications) and lacks clear plans to gather this. Without this it cannot demonstrate that access to all strategic housing services is fair and equitable.

ⁱ BRE - Building Research Establishment

ⁱⁱ Warm Zone - Warm Zones was set up in 2000 with Government support, to develop new approaches to fuel poverty

- 61 Housing market intelligence is not effectively integrated between partners and the Council lacks robust information about the housing needs of vulnerable people in private sector homes. Information from housing associations, Health Authorities and other partner organisations, is not integrated with the Council's own data to routinely inform targets and strategies. The BRE stock modelling identifies the worst properties but gives limited indication about the need or vulnerability of households. The Council cannot accurately target action to help the most vulnerable households, and instead relies upon advertising and the HIA 'staying put' scheme to get people to apply for help.
- 62 Positively, the Council commissions research to address some gaps in its knowledge of diverse housing needs. It has commissioned research in health and social care into the needs of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) residents. The homelessness IT system is now recording profiling data of applicants (from April 2010).

Are there robust housing and planning strategies and policies supporting delivery of housing priorities?

- 63 The Council is performing adequately in this area of work. Integrated council strategies reflect key housing objectives. A robust housing strategy is underpinned by a range comprehensive supporting strategies. Planning policy is strong and supports the delivery of new housing and regeneration objectives. A reasonable approach to improving the sustainability of housing is developing. However, housing strategies are not fully integrated with key partners' strategies and objectives. Equality Impact Assessments for housing strategies and policies are weak. Private sector housing strategies are not yet effectively tackling the poor condition of vulnerable households' homes.
- 64 Council strategies are integrated and share vision and objectives. The existing economic regeneration strategy 2006 to 2020 takes into account related council strategies, including housing. Access to safe, decent and affordable housing is an important aspect of regeneration. A priority is to bring empty homes back into use to revitalise local communities. Joint work to produce the North Tyneside economic assessment by April 2011 will ensure that housing objectives are integrated.
- 65 However, it is not clear how housing strategies have influenced, and are shaped by partners' plans and strategies. Positively, North Tyneside Council integrates its strategic approach to housing with both the Regional Housing Strategy and the Tyne and Wear sub-regional Strategy. However, integration with housing association, PCT and Crime and Disorder partnership strategies are less clear. The Council works well with partners operationally, but strategically the links are less clear, and are implicit rather than explicit. Partners may not be clear about their individual role in contributing to strategic objectives.
- 66 A comprehensive 2006 to 2010 housing strategy is underpinned by a range of mainly robust supporting strategies and action plans. Strategies are aligned to support delivery of the Council's SCS such as enhancing housing and employment opportunities. The housing strategy demonstrates a firm understanding of key local and sub-regional issues and covers all relevant strategic housing elements. It has clear links to other strategies and includes a wide range of challenging actions that, if delivered, will improve housing in North Tyneside.

Report

- 67** A reasonable private sector housing strategy has five key priorities that cover the areas of work necessary to tackle private sector house conditions. A robust cross-tenure empty homes strategy 2008 to 2011 has been used to meet a challenging LPSAⁱ stretch target to bring private sector empty properties back into use. There is a clear strategic approach to achieving decent homes in council housing through North Tyneside Homes.
- 68** The Supporting People strategy provides comprehensive information to strategically delivering housing support services for vulnerable people. Other strategies include a satisfactory homelessness strategy 2008 to 2013, and an affordable warmth strategy. Proposed actions are challenging but often lack measurable targets and outcomes. Robust strategies ensure the delivery of strategic objectives.
- 69** A robust framework ensures that the housing strategy is refreshed and kept up-to date. The Council started to update the strategy in 2009 – one year before it expired. Close working with the HCA, Council Cabinet and key partners on the HMP shaped three high level emerging strategic priorities (reduced from six in the current strategy).
- ensure a good housing supply to meet housing need;
 - enable a range of housing options to maintain independent living and prevent homelessness, and
 - drive up housing standards to improve neighbourhoods.

These themes are supported by detailed short, medium and long-term plans that will be refreshed each year to reflect changes in the current dynamic housing market. The approach to ensuring that housing is sustainable is strengthened by making it an underlying key principle rather than a separate theme (along with value for money, partnership working, and equality and diversity). The new strategy and action plans are on target to be approved by the end of 2010. Updating ensures that the housing strategy reflects current market conditions as well as the national, regional and sub-regional context.

- 70** Up-to-date knowledge is used to match supply to demand and address weaknesses in the local and sub-regional housing markets. Knowledge from the SHMA, SHLAA and other research/intelligence is being used to plan more executive homes in high demand areas such as Whitley Bay and Monkseaton. The Council understands what type and tenure of housing is needed to meet identified needs. It identifies land to match need and carries out viability tests. This helps to ensure that planned developments meet identified needs.
- 71** Although there is no specific older persons' housing strategy, the Quality Homes for Older People initiative provides a range of flexible support. As well as remodelling existing sheltered housing, this approach includes developing two new extra care schemes (some shared ownership), support through the Supporting People programme, adaptations, provision of wheelchair bungalows and community care alarms through housing associations. A range of options provides choices to help older people live independently in good quality homes that are suitable for their needs.

ⁱ LPSA: Local Public Service Agreements allow authorities to set challenging targets to deliver key national and local priorities in return for operational flexibilities and incentives, with rewards for success.

- 72 The lettings policy has been reviewed and provides a suitable framework for choice-based lettings. Suitable nomination agreements with housing associations ensure that all housing providers help to address local housing needs.
- 73 However, the Council currently lacks robust plans to tackle under-occupation. The SHMA identifies significant under-occupation in council stock (929 homes by one/two bedrooms) and 37 per cent across the Borough. The new lettings policy gives some priority for applicants to move to more appropriate homes (and encourages mutual exchanges), but the Council is not proactively providing incentives for people to move and release larger accommodation for people in priority need. This is being addressed through the review of the housing strategy and choice-based lettings.
- 74 A robust range of planning policies and guidance are routinely updated to reflect local issues, sub-regional housing markets and regional objectives in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)ⁱ. The LDF core strategy Preferred Options went to Cabinet for approval in June. It reflects a wide range of evidence (from the SHLAA, SHMA and other sources) and identifies local sites that will meet both RSS and growth point targets for overall housing and affordable housing. The Council has a rolling supply of 'viable' sites and sufficient provision until 2026/27. It proactively markets its own land to prioritise housing development. It carefully matches land supply to local housing needs to ensure the right type of housing and tenure is provided in line with infrastructure requirements – such as transport, retail requirements and schools.
- 75 Effective pre-application discussions with developers involve housing, planning and other officers. This ensures that developers are aware of design and other requirements at an early stage. The Council is flexible and pragmatic about planning requirements and supports developers to make marginal schemes more viable. The Council requires 25 per cent affordable housing on-sites of 15 units or more. Where schemes are not viable it may relax this target and other criteria, such as parking requirements to help achieve strategic targets. It will modify land values, clear sites, and reduce other contributions where appropriate to expedite development. Not enforcing parking provision on one small site in Wallsend enabled a scheme to be developed with the housing association developer providing travel permits for residents – this also helps achieve sustainability objectives. Decisions are open, transparent and accepted by developers. This flexible approach enables schemes to go ahead that would otherwise stall, while still maintaining high quality standards.
- 76 The Council has a reasonable approach to improving the sustainability of housing, that it is still developing. It has a new sustainable development team and is developing integrated sustainability objectives across the Borough. However, it currently lacks a robust strategy that is shared with key partners. The planning framework has a strong emphasis on sustainability and minimising the environmental impact of new development. The design quality SPDⁱⁱ and 'Building for Life' guidance provide high quality information for developers. They cover space standards, open spaces, designing out crime and lifetime homes standards.

ⁱ The Government committed to abolishing regional strategies in the Queen's Speech June 2010

ⁱⁱ SPD: Supplementary Planning Documents provide further detail and guidance on the implementation of planning policies and proposals.

- 77** The Council has piloted a ‘sustainable development appraisal toolkit’ on the housing strategy 2010 to 2015 emerging priorities. Design standards require all new affordable homes to be built to at least level three of the Code for Sustainable Homesⁱ. Although this is accepted as the minimum standard the Council aims to develop new affordable homes schemes to levels four, five or six. One housing association is currently building three homes to code level four on an infill site in North Shields. The Council and the HCA are financially supporting the development of two eco-homes (level six) by a housing association. Evaluation will inform future design standards and will be compared with the outcomes from, for example, a recently completed retro-fit scheme.
- 78** Planning powers support regeneration objectives. Planners and other staff work together in local neighbourhoods to improve waste land and the streetscape. It used 92 section 215 noticesⁱⁱ in 2009/10 to require action, but by working with owners only had to enforce five notices. It intervened to relax open space standards in East Howdon and on Longbenton to help address local problems. Joint action tackles local problems and makes areas better places to live.
- 79** The Council understands the need for new affordable homes. The SHMA identifies an annual need for 351 additional affordable homes. The Council estimates that 200 affordable homes can be provided by other initiatives (bringing empty homes back into use and working with private landlords through the Deposit Guarantee Scheme - DGS). This leaves a target of 151 new affordable homes of which intermediate housing should be 25 per cent (the overall target for new homes has been reduced from 586 to 280 in 2010/11 to reflect the economic downturn). Targets are challenging but are practical to reflect the local context and economic conditions.
- 80** Although the Council demonstrates its corporate commitment to diversity (it is classed as ‘achieving’ under the Equality Framework for Local Government), Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are not robust. They do not identify how housing strategies impact on diverse groups and what action is taken to address weaknesses or issues. The EIA for the private sector housing strategy assesses that it does not adversely impact on diverse groups. This simple assessment does not recognise that diverse groups often live in the worst private sector housing. Their vulnerability may mean that they fail to access services and require more help. The Council is not using EIAs effectively to ensure that resources are directed to address potential disadvantage. The Council recognises this weakness and is working to improve the quality of EIAs.

ⁱ Code for Sustainable Homes: a national standard for the sustainable design and construction of new homes. Sustainability rating range from levels one (above building regulations) to six (zero carbon home). Code level three is generally accepted as the minimum standard for new housing.

ⁱⁱ Town and Country Planning Act 1990 section 215 – allows councils to take steps requiring land to be cleaned up when its condition adversely affects the amenity of an area

- 81 Energy efficiency strategies between council homes and private sector homes are not fully integrated. The Council is not using positive improvement work to council homes to target the improvement of adjacent private homes. It offers, but is not incentivising work to improve the thermal insulation of non-traditional 'Orlit' privately owned homes. Work costs £28,000 and only one owner has taken up an offer. Annual savings of £235 energy costs and a likely increase in property value are not promoted, together with support, such as low interest loans, to encourage take-up. As a result these private homes still have poor energy efficiency (39 SAPⁱ rating compared to 68 in council homes), and the appearance of partially improved semi-detached homes spoils overall estate improvement.
- 82 A strategic approach to tackling the poor condition of homes of vulnerable households is still developing. Although there are some examples of tackling unfit homes, and some targeting of energy efficiency work, the Council lacks a robust integrated approach to tackle the worst homes and provide housing support for the most vulnerable people. Some vulnerable households are not getting the help they may need. The proposed gateway for Supporting People services later in 2010 will ensure resources are better prioritised.

Capacity to deliver: does the Council have the capacity to deliver its housing vision effectively now and in the future?

Are the right skills, tools, behaviours and partnerships in place to ensure effective delivery of housing priorities?

- 83 The Council is performing well in this area of work. Generally strong sub-regional and local partnerships boost capacity. Relationships with developers are positive. Joint working between the housing strategy team and other departments is effective. Human resource planning and training is generally effective, increasing capacity, skills and knowledge. However, external communication and workforce profile monitoring is not fully effective.
- 84 The Council generally has the right level of skills and capacity to manage its strategic housing services effectively. This includes planning policy, homelessness and housing advice, and private sector housing. The Council split its landlord and strategic housing functions to ensure that the strategic function was adequately resourced and integrated with other council functions, particularly planning. The housing strategy team is sufficiently well-resourced with a manager and ten staff. The team sits within the Development Directorate, which brings together other key strategic services, helping to integrate strategic development and service delivery.

ⁱ SAP - standard assessment procedure: a way to measure energy efficiency

Report

- 85** Internal and external partnership arrangements increase capacity. Relationships with developers, housing associations and other agencies, such as the HCA, are strong. Sub-regional working has increased capacity through, for example, the choice-based lettings (CBL) system. The Council strengthens resources and capacity where needed. The homelessness prevention forum is developing internal and external partnerships to prevent homelessness, and support households at risk of homelessness. For example, a new youth homelessness officer visits schools with housing association partners to educate children to help them avoid homelessness and debt.
- 86** A welfare benefits adviser has been added to the homelessness team as part of a wider financial inclusion initiative. Health visitors visit people in temporary accommodation, focussing, for example, on sexual health. The education department has provided help through a specialist teacher for transient childrenⁱ. External expertise is used to develop services, for example using advice from the Northern Housing Consortium to develop landlord accreditation. Effective joint working in planning pre-application meetings with developers improves the development process.
- 87** The NTSP and the Council's Development Strategy Board bring together key service areas such as planning, housing strategy, transport and external partners where appropriate, for example the PCT and Nexusⁱⁱ. This helps to integrate strategies, boost capacity and programmes, and helps to ensure a coordinated approach to delivering council priorities such as the emerging economic assessment. Partnership working with health services through the PCT is developing, but is not yet fully effective.
- 88** Human resource planning and training is generally effective. The Council has a clear people strategy 2008 to 2011, supported by guidance for sickness absence and individual performance reviews (IPR). A thorough 'managing people self-assessment' sets out the Council's approach to ensure it has a productive and skilled workforce. The Council has 'mindful employer' statusⁱⁱⁱ. It regularly identifies staff training needs and skills shortages through the IPR process. Staff have received management development training through the North-East Excellent Managers Programme. Specific seminars and training ensure that strategic housing staff have the appropriate knowledge and skills to deliver strategic objectives.
- 89** The Council identifies and takes action to address skills gaps. It is developing its capacity to assess complex sustainability requirements of new developments through the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with Northumbria University. Two research associates give specialist advice on efficiency standards, renewable energy systems and enhancing design. Expert advice provides a robust basis to develop a corporate approach to sustainable housing.
- 90** Internal communication and joint working relationships are strong between, for example, housing, planning, benefits and homelessness teams. Regular team briefings, team meetings, housing strategy newsletter and liaison meetings ensure that staff understand key issues and the part they play in delivering strategic objectives.

ⁱ This helps children who may not have a permanent home, or who are passing through the Borough

ⁱⁱ Nexus - the operations arm of the Tyne and Wear Integrated Transport Authority

ⁱⁱⁱ The mindful employer initiative promotes awareness of mental health at work and provides support for businesses in recruiting and retaining staff.

- 91 External communication is not as strong. Key partners are kept informed through regular forums but a wider group of all partners and stakeholders rely on occasional briefings and letters about specific issues, such as the current discussion document for refreshing the housing strategy, to keep them up-to-date. Some partners do not feel well informed and so are less able to make a positive contribution.
- 92 ICT systems support strategic development and delivery. Performance reporting and management is facilitated through 'performance explorer' software. Housing and planning staff share access to information databases. Technology is used to improve performance such as through GIS mapping, and using thermal imaging to target energy efficiency work. Other support includes E-learning packages and integrated key business management systems. New IT is being developed to support the work of the housing options team and allow better monitoring of service provision.
- 93 The Council monitors its workforce profile by gender, age, disability and ethnicity, but it lacks information by religion/faith and sexuality. The Council plans to address this during 2010. Without robust information it cannot demonstrate that its workforce reflects the profile of the communities it serves and cannot target vacancies to encourage under-represented groups to apply.

Are arrangements in place to keep delivery of housing priorities on track and promote a culture of continuous improvement?

- 94 The Council is performing adequately in this area of work. A clear framework ensures that strategic housing objectives and targets are well integrated. Performance on delivering targets is managed effectively locally and sub-regionally. Under-performance is addressed. The approach to risk management is satisfactory. The Council generally ensures that any political tensions do not unduly change and delay delivering key housing objectives. However, plans and strategies lack measurable targets and outcomes. The Council is not effectively sharing data and monitoring performance with partners. Benchmarking and learning from others is piecemeal and not yet effective.
- 95 Strategic housing objectives and targets are well integrated. A hierarchy of plans ensure that actions and targets in housing strategies, service plans and individual performance plans are linked to corporate objectives. The North Tyneside Strategic Partnership's (NTSP) overarching sustainable community strategy (SCS) and Local Area Agreement (LAA) provides the basis for the Council Plan 2010/13, departmental plans and service plans. The SCS is currently being refreshed. Five themed partnerships of the NTSP help deliver the SCS, the regeneration and enterprise partnership covers housing. This framework helps to ensure that staff and partners understand their roles in delivering key objectives.

Report

- 96** Although the political administration changed in 2009 officers and councillors have worked together to maintain programmes. Council officers tackle tensions between political parties through, for example regular briefing and training sessions for members to increase their awareness of key issues. Greater understanding helps to ensure cross party support for housing initiatives such as the new domestic violence refuge. Major schemes, particularly the PFI sheltered housing project, have been reviewed, but delays and inconvenience have been minimised. A six-month review led to scheme changes, but the scheme is still targeted to be completed on time in 2016. Broad cross-party support and understanding ensures that strategic housing objectives are delivered on time.
- 97** Planned action in a comprehensive housing strategy improvement plan 2009 to 2011 addresses key weaknesses and issues. Close monitoring of the plan includes quarterly commentary on performance, and a traffic light assessment of targets and strategic housing performance indicators (PIs). All action is currently assessed as on target and most strategic housing PIs are on target.
- 98** However, housing plans and strategies lack measurable targets and outcomes and the Council is not routinely evaluating and promoting the success of its work. The 'How did we do? Housing Strategy 2006 to 2010 review' details what was done, but it is very general and does not evaluate the impact of work. The Council supports vulnerable people at risk of homelessness. However although there are records of the number of tenancies that are sustained, there is no measurement of interventions that are successful and so the Council is not able to make use of monitoring to improve services for customers.
- 99** Key actions in the housing strategy 2006-2010 lack measurable targets and projected outcomes. Positively, data is available that could be used to measure the impact of the strategic housing work. Without projected measurable outcomes the Council cannot robustly measure the success of its action, and lacks clarity about what it is trying to achieve.
- 100** The Council effectively manages the performance of strategic housing. A clear performance framework ensures that appropriate and timely performance information is reviewed at different levels of the organisation. This ranges from area forums (with a range of PIs selected by residents), through team and heads of service meetings, departmental meetings, the corporate management team, to the Council Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Progress against the LAA, Council Plan and service plans is reported quarterly using a corporate health scorecard and key performance indicators.
- 101** Joint cabinet member briefings help to ensure a joined-up approach. The Tyne and Wear heads of service groups monitors monthly progress with the regional and sub-regional housing strategies. A useful service status report to the department director highlights key achievements, risks and how the strategic housing service is making efficiencies. Planning approvals are suitably monitored and reported in the planning annual monitoring report - the provision of new housing is monitored quarterly. Clear performance management structures drive the delivery of housing priorities.

- 102** Performance reports highlight trends, performance against target, comparisons and exception reports provide a commentary for weaker areas. Performance targets are revised and kept up-to-date to reflect changing circumstances. The Government Office accepted reducing the target for new homes from 586 to 280 in 2010/11 to reflect the economic downturn and local impact on house building. The Council intervenes to address under-performance. Corrective action is taken to address, for example, performance delivering affordable homes and council decent homes targets. The Mayor meets the Council's repairs partnerⁱ and takes a personal interest in securing improved performance. Tackling under-performance helps to achieve targets.
- 103** Particular groups oversee and direct specific areas of work. The Strategic Investment Group is attended by the Mayor, senior Cabinet members and senior officers. It manages the delivery of the Council's capital programme including the disposal of surplus land. The Housing Strategy Development Group drives improvement and the supply of affordable housing.
- 104** The approach to risk management is generally clear. The strategy is comprehensive and the risk register includes key strategic housing risks. These include links with the HCA; delivery of affordable housing; increased benefits due to the recession; planning decisions not being sustained on appeal; loss of housing and planning delivery grant (HPDG); and the influx of refugees/asylum seekers. However, the risk register omits some key risks such as the level of empty homes and unlicensed houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) despite intensive work being done to control the number of empty homes. Housing risks are discussed at team and management meetings. Generally effective management helps to mitigate the potential impact of key risks.
- 105** The Council is self aware, recognises key weaknesses and seeks to continually improve. For example, council leaders and senior officers understand that value for money is not yet embedded, community engagement is not strategic, and it is not effectively benchmarking and using learning from top performers to improve services. Performance management of partners and contractors is not yet effective in securing early improvement, such as by the NTH repair contractor. Accepting weaknesses improves the likelihood of them being addressed.
- 106** The Council is developing its approach to sharing information with, and monitoring the performance of partners. The NTSP is improving how it monitors and integrates partner performance, including through the JSNA. The Council accepts that formal and routine monitoring of services by voluntary partners is not yet effective. Understanding of housing association performance focuses on allocations and new development, and there is limited knowledge about housing management performance such as action to tackle antisocial behaviour and rent arrears. It is not yet coordinating performance monitoring with the Tenant Services Authority local standards framework. Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) performance is monitored quarterly, but this focuses on outputs and not the quality of services. Without effective monitoring and coordination of performance by all partners the Council does not know how effectively partners are contributing to key housing objectives.

ⁱ An external contractor provides the repair service to council homes managed by North Tyneside Homes.

- 107** Benchmarking is underdeveloped. Staff use feedback and some evaluation of schemes to improve services, but they do not formally benchmark individual elements such as aids and adaptations or the new development process. The Council has benchmarked performance on national indicators with several similar authorities and this shows mixed performance with several indicators in the best and worst quartiles.
- 108** A 'peer challenge' in March 2009 was very positive about the strategic housing function. The Council is taking action to address identified weaknesses in the 'peer challenge' report. There has been limited homelessness benchmarking with the Tyne and Wear authorities, although benchmarking did lead to improvements with temporary accommodation. There is some evidence of learning from others but it is not routine or embedded. An external learning log gives examples of visits, but does not show what changed as a result. Benchmarking and learning from other organisations is not routinely used to improve services.

Does the Council plan and manage its finances and other resources to support the effective delivery of its strategic housing priorities and achieve value for money

- 109** The Council is performing adequately in this area of work. Financial planning and management is sound. The Council has a strong track record of delivering on budget and delivering efficiency savings. Significant external funding increases resources to deliver strategic objectives. However, the Council lacks a robust understanding of its strategic housing costs and a culture of value for money is not yet embedded.
- 110** Financial planning and management is sound. The Council's financial resources are matched to the themes of the Council Plan and its business and resource planning covers the medium-term 2010 to 2013. A three-year planning timeframe ensures that future plans are properly resourced. The Council improves efficiency through its resource planning framework. It has a corporate track record of delivering on budget and delivering value for money (VfM), making over £50 million in savings since 2002. The Council's 2009 to 2014 VfM plan aims to deliver £126 million of cumulative efficiencies over the five-year period.
- 111** The Council has funded the decent homes programme to its council housing (North Tyneside Homes) through a balance of borrowing and capital receipts. The outturn for the HRA in 2009/10 was £3 million better than planned. Sound financial management ensures that resources are available to deliver services and projects within budget.
- 112** Budgets are re-aligned to meet priorities. The Council closely manages resources to deliver services within its medium-term financial plan. It has increased resources for Disabled Facilities Grants to reflect increased demand and the higher cost of work. It re-directed £180,000 from private sector grants and used SHIP funding to supplement the original £700,000 budget. This helped to ensure that there is no waiting list backlog and people receive the work they need to improve the accessibility of their homes in a timely manner.

- 113** The strategic housing service makes significant savings. A thorough review of the homelessness service has significantly reduced costs from £500,000 in 2007 to under £60,000 by 2010. A focus on homelessness prevention, reducing the use of temporary accommodation, bed and breakfast and storage for furniture has delivered major efficiency savings. The Council calculates that it has saved up to £756,000 by preventing 168 cases of homelessness due to domestic violence, ending of shorthold tenancies and family breakdown, at an estimated cost of £4,500 per case. Creating 100 tenancies through the deposit guarantee scheme (DGS) prevents potential homelessness also at an estimated saving of £4,500 a case (saving £450,000). Other savings include £62,000 by recycling adaptations equipment and using an adapted property register to allocate homes more effectively makes additional un-quantified savings.
- 114** Supporting vulnerable people in the communityⁱ results in value for money savings. The housing support coordinators give advice to 96 households at £50.24 per household. The refugee integration team provide support for asylum seekers at a cost of £53.65 per household. The costs of these services are in the lowest 25 per cent nationally for similar services. Efficiency savings provide additional resources for service improvements and in many cases low level housing related support to vulnerable people reduces the need for intervention from other agencies.
- 115** The Council pools resources and works with partners to give better value for money. It pools some occupational therapy (OT) resources with the PCT to providing advice on choice-based lettings, and better use of adapted homes has contributed to 18 per cent nursing and residential care savings. Joint working improves the efficiency and quality of service, and maximise resources.
- 116** Future additional efficiency savings are planned. An additional 108 extra care apartments and 4 bungalows will help to reduce the number of older people who enter permanent residential and nursing care. An annual standard residential care placement costs around £21,000 per annum. From 2006 to 2009 adult social care reduced permanent admissions into residential care by over 21 per cent. Un-quantified savings from the proposed gateway service for supported housing are also anticipated.
- 117** The Council is skilled at leveraging-in significant external funding to support its housing and associated priorities. A long track record gives the Council the experience and skills it needs to maximise additional resources and increase capacity. Funding from all sources has increased from £3.2 million in 2006/07 to £8.3 million in 2009/10. National Affordable housing Programme (NAHP) funding of £14.7 million (from the 2008 to 2011 programme) provides 283 new affordable homes. The Council also receives £1 million growth point funding. LPSA funding has helped to create a new post to tackle private sector empty homes.

ⁱ CLG estimates that each £1 invested in housing related support saves other agencies£3.43.

Report

- 118** A special projects officer is funded through SHIP to coordinate and monitor the investment programme and also work with housing associations (total £3.45 million funding 2008 to 2011). PFI funding of £112.5 million will improve and redevelop the Council's sheltered schemes. SHIP money has been used to pump-prime funding for the Warm Zone initiative, securing £4 for every £1 supplied by SHIP. Other external investment includes Housing and Planning Delivery Grant; and the Homelessness Grant for the Sanctuary Scheme. Additional funding is supporting and adding value to strategic housing programmes.
- 119** Appropriate provision is made for planning obligations and developer contributions (section 106/planning gain) on new developments. All section 106 agreements are closely monitored on a comprehensive spreadsheet. The Council has secured a total of £9.8 million in section 106 agreements, of which £8.1 million has been paid and £1.7 million is not yet due. Contributions support the delivery of more affordable homes, the associated infrastructure and community facilities.
- 120** The Council has successfully attracted additional resources in partnership with the Tyne and Wear councils. Funding from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) helps vulnerable people as part of the city strategy pathfinder programme. This gives the Council the opportunity to influence wider regional and national programmes. Work has provided additional support for vulnerable people in the Council's poorest wards through a two year programme levering-in £900,000 in extra money.
- 121** Close working with the HCA, developing housing associations and house builders gives a joint understanding of priorities and indicative grant levels. The single conversation with the HCA has drawn in £17 million in grant. It allows the Council to match resources through grant funding to development plans for affordable housing. Work ensures that affordable housing scheme costs are realistic and housing associations are able to identify where cost savings can be made.
- 122** The Council has had some success reducing the high cost of managing its temporary accommodation. All the schemes were considered to be high cost when they were fully assessed in 2007. Costs have since reduced from £275 per unit at the male hostel to £228 in 2008/09; from £236 at the female hostel to £203; from £50 at the family hostel to £20; and from £34 in the dispersed family properties to £19. These efficiency savings from the service review have contributed to reducing the amount of Supporting People grant required by approximately £200,000. The Council recognises that its hostels do not provide adequate value for money and is reconfiguring its temporary emergency accommodation provision to meet the needs of customers.
- 123** Although there are substantial examples of efficiency savings, a VfM culture is not yet embedded throughout the strategic housing service. There are no service specific or individual staff efficiency targets. The Council lacks a robust VfM strategy showing how it will achieve VfM with the strategic housing service. It lacks a robust understanding of the individual costs of strategic services, the relationship to quality and how this compares with top performers. Strategic housing staff are currently working with a national organisation to develop a benchmarking group and establish an understanding of costs.

- 124** As part of the Council's transformation programme, consultants undertook independent VfM assessments of 51 of the Council's services, including the strategic housing service. Based on limited data, it found that the service was upper quartile for quality of service and outputs, median for cost and inconclusive for customer satisfaction outcomes. Understanding costs/quality helps to deliver better value for money by making services lower cost and higher quality. It is taking action to address weaknesses through a VfM task group.
- 125** Although feedback from a range of sources is used to understand the success of new housing and regenerating neighbourhoods, the Council is not routinely measuring satisfaction of the occupants of new homes. It is not gathering and using such feedback to test the success of its design requirements and effectiveness of local ancillary facilities. Feedback from customers is not being used to continually improve standards and services.
- 126** Joint working between partners is not always effective. Joint working is not minimising lost income with a new extra care scheme. The scheme was completed in March 2010 and, although over-subscribed, 50 per cent of apartments were still unoccupied at the end of May. More homes could have been allocated during development to minimise lost rent, while still managing and supporting a phased occupation.

Capacity to deliver – do commissioning and procurement arrangements for strategic housing delivery help to maximise value for money and sustainability?

- 127** The Council is performing well in this area of work. A strong corporate framework commissions and procures services and new developments to meet strategic objectives, and deliver value for money. Procurement options are routinely evaluated and good use is made of partnerships to make savings and efficiencies. Council owned land and assets are used to facilitate development. However, the Council is not routinely evaluating and promoting the impact of sustainable development.
- 128** A strong approach commissions and procures strategic housing services. A framework of the Sustainable Community Strategy, the Housing Strategy, SHMA and the JSNA is used to commission services in line with strategic objectives. The Council recognises the importance of commissioning strategic housing services through a range of partners and integrating its approach through the LAA. A robust Procurement Strategy 2008 to 2012 and supporting guidance ensures that procurement procedures meet legislative requirements and that contracts offer value for money. A 'how to purchase' guide supports officers. A Sustainable Procurement Strategy helps to achieve VfM on a whole-life basis and minimise damage to the environment.
- 129** The Supporting People Commissioning and Procurement Strategy 2008 to 2011 outlines priorities for improving housing support services for vulnerable people. Strategic reviews of housing support and care services for people with mental health problems and learning disabilities concluded in April 2010. Tendering the floating support service in 2008 saved £102,000. A review of homelessness services resulted in plans to develop a Gateway Service. The refuge provision for women escaping domestic violence has just been re-tendered. Joint Health and Social Care Commissioning Strategies prioritises housing and support choices for people with learning disabilities. A clear strategic approach helps to ensure that services are procured to meet priority needs.

Report

- 130** Procurement options are routinely examined to give value for money and better quality of services. The Council examined different service and procurement options before deciding to jointly commission a BRE stock profile assessment with the Tyne and Wear Housing Partnership. This ensured economies of scale and reduced costs by £1,500 per authority, as well as saving an estimated £50,000 on the cost of undertaking a traditional stock survey. The Council was able to use savings to undertake more focused surveys to address gaps in its knowledge of stock condition across the Borough. For example, detailed thermal imaging enables the Council to target future energy efficiency work more effectively.
- 131** Modern procurement methods are used to evaluate and deliver new development. A partnership between the Council, a housing association, the HCA and Department of Health was used to joint fund the £14.8 million extra care and older person's housing schemes. The development of 108 two-bedroom apartments includes 21 for shared ownership. The development also includes four bungalows for people with learning disabilities. The PCT funds an occupational therapist for the extra care schemes and to support older people through outreach work. This scheme is projected to save £175,000 a year on adult social care and health costs by reducing admissions to care and hospital.
- 132** The Council makes good use of resources to commission and jointly procure local and regional services. It worked with other city region authorities to put together the bid for regional funding allocations. The Council uses the procurement of major works to provide training and employment opportunities (see outcomes in following section). The 2009 SHMA was procured in accordance with procurement framework. A regionally procured independent home loans administrator and a common North-East Financial Assistance Policy delivers better quality services and value for money. The regional loans fund, financed through SHIP, will help to extend resources available for renovating property and helping vulnerable people. Regional procurement of the CBL system saved an estimated £27,000.
- 133** Positive joint working with the Duke of Northumberland estates procured land at Northumberland Park. Section 106 funding of £3.75 million contributed to a new Metro station, school provision, and traffic calming to support development. The Council responded positively to mitigate the impact of the recession and downturn in house building by working with the developer and the HCA to use £1.27 million NAHP funding to provide 20 affordable homes for rent. This helped to maintain construction jobs as well as provide new homes.
- 134** Good use of council-owned land and assets supports housing development. This includes the two extra care schemes. Housing Revenue Account land is used to develop schemes that provide 100 per cent affordable housing. The Council also uses strategic land acquisitions in Wallsend, at the Swan Hunters and town centre sites to help regenerate local areas. The Council levered-in £73,000 Housing Planning and Development Grant funding in 2009/10 and Growth Point funding of just under £2 million over the last two years to facilitate new development. It uses this to carry out studies, flood risk assessments, land clearance to help make marginal schemes viable.

- 135** The Council is not routinely evaluating and promoting the positive impact from requiring all new homes to meet level three (or above) of the Code for Sustainable Homes. The Council estimates that households benefit from a 30 to 40 per cent reduction in electricity bills in a home built to code level four. But the Council is not encouraging broader take-up of energy efficiency work in the private sector by promoting the impact of sustainable developments.
- 136** The outcome of procurement options is not always effectively communicated to developing partners. House builders welcome the positive relationship and support given by the Council, but are unaware of the reasons why an option to put council-owned land into a partnership agreement has not progressed. This option would help builders get schemes on-site with the Council recovering land values at a later date (through profit sharing). The option was not considered viable but reasons were not suitably explained. Although relationships remain positive, uncertainty, if not addressed, reduces the effectiveness of joint working.

Improving housing outcomes for the local community: is the strategic approach to housing delivering better housing outcomes for the local community?

Is new market and affordable housing offering greater choice for new and existing households and promoting sustainable communities?

- 137** The Council is performing adequately in this area of work. It has exceeded regional medium-term targets to build new homes. Performance on developing new affordable homes is improving from a very low base. The Council responds positively to mitigate the impact of the economic downturn on the housing market. New homes are well designed, are linked to local infrastructure, support regeneration objectives and are increasingly sustainable. However, performance on providing a range of intermediate homes is weak. Feedback and satisfaction of householders in new homes is not routinely measured.
- 138** Performance on building new homes to meet local and regional needs is generally positive. Although new house completions have steadily reduced since 2006/07 the Council has met its overall medium-term targets. Between 2004 and 2011 the regional target was to build 2,800 homes. By 31 March 2009 3,554 properties had been built, although demolitions and conversions reduced the net gain to 2,960. Annual targets were exceeded in the early years, 726 in 2006/07, with performance reducing to only 366 completions (286 net) in 2009/10.
- 139** The Council is confident that it can deliver the higher growth point target of 586 net additional homes a year between 2008/09 and 2016/17; the target has been reduced to 280 for 2010/11. North Tyneside has had the most extensive new house-building programme in the Tyne and Wear sub-region over the last 15 years. This has contributed to attracting residents from surrounding districts, particularly Newcastle. Delivery of new homes has supported the successful bid for growth point status.

Report

- 140** The track record on delivering new affordable homes is weaker but rapidly improving. Performance against the old target of 30 per cent affordable housing on-sites of over 15 units is poor, although it improved from 6 per cent in 2006/07 to 17 per cent in 2008/09 and 52 per cent in 2009/10. Performance has to be seen in the context of long lead-in times after the Council prioritised building more affordable homes two years ago. The Council and the NTSP prioritised developing additional new affordable homes from a low base of only 33 new homes in 2006/07, of which 16 were intermediate, low cost homes.
- 141** The Council responded positively during the house building downturn, to support builders and access additional funding. One scheme provided 41 new affordable homes in place of homes that were not selling. As a result the number of new affordable homes more than doubled from 80 in 2008/09 to 189, including 39 intermediate, low cost homes, in 2009/10. Recent performance included securing one-off funding opportunities, such as Kickstartⁱ, that may not be available in the future. The Council has a stretching target to provide 151 new affordable homes a year, this may not be sustained in the current economic environment. New affordable homes are essential to meet housing needs.
- 142** New homes are well designed, are linked to local infrastructure, support regeneration objectives and are increasingly sustainable. Properties we viewed were of a high quality, with different types of housing and tenures well integrated. New developments, such as at Northumberland Park, include major infrastructure improvements. New housing supports regeneration initiatives using infill sites, such as in Wallsend, complementing work to improve neighbourhoods.
- 143** To support sustainability objectives the Council aims to redevelop 'brownfield' sites. It has increased the percentage of homes built on previously developed land from 72 per cent in 2007/08 to 80 per cent in 2009/10. A new scheme at St Aidan's Close has provided 22 new homes built to lifetime home standards. However, the Council is not measuring how many new homes are 'secured by design'. Although no homes with eco-excellent or low energy features were developed between 2006/07 and 2008/09, the Council is developing its approach to requiring sustainable standards for new homes. High quality sustainable homes help to balance communities and achieve corporate sustainability objectives.
- 144** New housing schemes add value and give broader community benefits. Developments provide training opportunities, apprenticeships and community facilities, for example at Wallsend. Support during the economic downturn enabled schemes to stay on-site. One developer was able to keep 115 employees working at Northumberland Park.

ⁱ Kickstart Housing Delivery is a £400m government programme, targeted at currently stalled sites

- 145** Performance on providing a range of new low cost homes is weak. The Council only developed 67 units of intermediate housing (particularly shared ownership), and helped facilitate access to a further 72 through the Homebuyⁱ initiative, between 2006 and 2010. No 'below market' rented or key worker homes have been developed, as backed-up by the SHMA, the Council had seen no need for market intervention until recently. However, it lacks robust evidence to show that it is delivering the right mix of affordable, intermediate and open-market homes in the right place, at the right time, to meet all types housing needs. The Council lacks challenging targets based on identified needs in the SHMA and other market intelligence. However the Council has identified five new schemes which will provide discount market units and has plans to provide more low cost housing in the future. The right balance of type and forms of housing are needed to provide choice and help balance housing markets.
- 146** Performance on processing major planning applications in 13 weeks improved from 73 per cent in 2007/08 to 86 per cent in 2008/09, but was only 53 per cent in 2009/10. The Council understands the reasons for delays, including s106 agreements, complex negotiations and election deferrals, and has identified action to improve performance in 2010/11. Weak performance delays the development of new homes.
- 147** The Council provides some new accommodation to meet some diverse needs. New extra care schemes provide additional housing choices for older people, including shared ownership. Shared ownership options are also available for people with learning disabilities. Over the last four years 83 additional units of supported housing were delivered. The Council is developing further provision, including the refuge for women fleeing domestic violence. However, the Council is not yet meeting the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, although it has included plans for a site of nine pitches in its core strategy.
- 148** Although the Council gathers feedback from a range of sources to understand the success of new housing and regenerating neighbourhoods, it is not routinely measuring satisfaction of the occupants of new homes. It is not gathering and using feedback to test the success of its design standards and the effectiveness of local ancillary facilities. Feedback from customers is not routinely used to continually improve standards and services.

Is there an effective approach to improving the quality and use of existing housing and promoting sustainable neighbourhoods?

- 149** The Council is performing adequately in this area of work. Neighbourhoods are improving through regeneration work. Work supports the financial inclusion of residents. Resident satisfaction is significantly improving. Most social rented homes meet the decent homes standard. Action to improve the energy efficiency of homes is strong. There is some positive performance tackling empty homes in regeneration areas to bring them back into use, but there are still too many long-term empty homes. Adaptations work is satisfactory. But the condition of private sector homes is not significantly improving. Work to licence houses in multiple occupation and to address under-occupation is underdeveloped. Outcomes from work with private landlords and other private sector work are not routinely measured and evaluated.

ⁱ HomeBuy enables social tenants, key workers and first time buyers, who earn less than £60,000 a year, to buy a share of a newly built home and get a first step on the housing ladder.

Report

- 150** Regeneration programmes are improving neighbourhoods. The Council targets work to improve the most unpopular housing, support disadvantaged communities and help make neighbourhoods more sustainable. In Longbenton, public and private sectors have invested more than £70 million. Following improvement work, resident satisfaction with the place they live is the highest in the Borough at over 90 per cent.
- 151** Town centre regeneration in Wallsend and North Shields is improving housing and helping the local economies. At East Howdon Village a range of projects improved local housing conditions. Homefinder has helped to generate demand for homes that were previously difficult to let. Overall levels of deprivation are reducing. North Tyneside is no longer in the most deprived 50 districts in England. Regeneration improves the appearance, popularity and stability of neighbourhoods.
- 152** The regeneration of Battle Hill has delivered significant outcomes. Unpopular deck-access maisonettes were replaced with new housing, including affordable homes and a new shopping centre. The Council levered-in over £10 million private sector investment, which led to 78 full time and 48 part-time jobs in the new shopping centre and health clinic. More people are visiting the new library and increasing public access to ICT facilities. The total number of reported crimes has reduced by 36 per cent, from 587 incidents in 2007/08 to 376 in 2009/10. Reports of antisocial behaviour have reduced by 32 per cent, from 1,023 incidents in 2007/08 to 697 in 2009/10. Battle Hill is a safer and better place to live.
- 153** Overall resident satisfaction with North Tyneside as a place to live is improving. Almost 86 per cent of residents are positive about living in the Borough according to the 2009 resident survey, increasing from 84 per cent in 2007. People satisfied with the Council improved from 55 per cent to 69 per cent, and 72 per cent say that they are well informed, compared to 68 per cent in 2007.
- 154** The Council supports financial inclusion. It helps people get benefit advice to maintain tenancies and independence. Council benefits advice teams have helped more than 500 people to secure over £500,000 in additional benefits. This has included the in-house bailiff team has identifying 110 residents who are eligible for additional discounts and benefits worth £90,000. The Warm Zone initiative, see below, has helped to reduce utility bills for vulnerable households. Housing advice has helped 179 customers to sustain their tenancies and receive £33,972 of additional benefits. The Council is also starting to work with 11 schools to support financial inclusion training. This work is making a positive difference to vulnerable residents.
- 155** Performance is mixed on bringing private sector empty homes back into use. The LPSAⁱ target to bring 314 private sector properties back into use over a three-year period was exceeded (354 properties). This brought £444,000 reward grant into North Tyneside. In 2009/10, 105 empty homes were bought back into use by targeting work in priority areas where empty properties are likely to cause a housing market imbalance. The number of private sector homes vacant for six months or more is reducing. The number increased from 485 in April 2007 to 1,025 in April 2009, before reducing to 898 by April 2010.

ⁱ LPSA - Local Public Service Agreement: give authorities the opportunity to sign up to challenging targets to deliver key national and local priorities in return for operational flexibilities and incentives, with rewards for success.

- 156** The Council has not used any empty dwelling management orders (EDMOs), although two properties have been bought back into use following the threat of serving EDMOs. There has been particular success in areas like East Howdon where intensive work with landlords got rid of all long-term empty properties. However, outside key neighbourhoods there has been no targeted work. Here the Council relies on responding to complaints. As noted previously work to address under-occupation is underdeveloped. Where successful the Council has improved the living environment for local people, provided accommodation and helped to balance the housing market. Bringing empty homes back into use increase the number of affordable homes.
- 157** The condition of social housing in North Tyneside has significantly improved. Most social rented homes are decentⁱ. Over £120 million investment has reduced the number of non-decent council homes (managed through North Tyneside Homes) to 14 per cent (from 45 per cent in 2006/07). Work is on target to deliver the decent homes target by the end of 2010, other than with 6 per cent in sheltered housing (being addressed through the PFI scheme). Only 5 per cent of housing association homes are estimated to be non-decent. Most social rented tenants live in good quality homes.
- 158** The energy efficiency of homes is significantly improving through targeted programmes. Decent homes programmes have improved the SAPⁱⁱ ratings of council homes from 61 in 2006/07 to 67 in 2008/09 – although this is below the average for all councils in 2007/08 (2009/10 data is not yet available). A ‘retro-fit’ of a former caretaker’s home gives the Council experience using modern technologies to improve the energy efficiency of older homes. Improving the energy efficiency of homes, helps vulnerable people, reduces fuel poverty and helps to deliver strategic sustainability objectives.
- 159** Warm Zone is improving housing conditions in the private sector. In areas most likely to contain vulnerable households, representatives of Warm Zone visit every home to offer insulation at a flat fee of £99. However, due to limitations in current technology there has been less success in insulating properties with solid walls. A local housing association is due to pilot a project to test new techniques this year. As part of its effort to combat fuel poverty advisers have helped to maximise benefit entitlement. Warm Zone has delivered 10,493 insulation measures to a value of £2,456,212 giving an estimated annual fuel bill saving of £1,415,992, and secured £2,352,524 in additional means tested benefits for 800 households. This has given estimated lifetime carbon savings of 213,278 tons. Warm Zone helps to improve the household budgets and living conditions of vulnerable people.
- 160** Appendix one shows that the condition of private sector housing is not significantly improving. Between 2006/07 and 2008/09 the number of demolitions reduced from ten to eight; minor works grants increased from 103 to 146; decent homes renovation grants stayed at just over 50; the percentage of non-decent homes made decent stayed at around 1 per cent. Equity release schemes have recently been made available to help private homeowners to improve their homes. There is little use of enforcement and planning procedures to tackle private housing in the worst condition.

ⁱ Decent homes Standard - minimum standard for social housing revised in 2006 by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System

ⁱⁱ SAP - standard assessment procedure: a way to measure energy efficiency

Report

- 161** The number of improvement notices fell from six in 2006/07 to none in 2008/09. Action is limited to targeted areas (such as East Howdon) and grants are not generally available. Positively, the percentage of non-decent private sector homes occupied by vulnerable people reduced from 47 per cent in 2006/07 to 40 per cent in 2009/10. The Council is unlikely to achieve the former government target of 70 per cent of vulnerable people in the private sector living in decent homes, and its LAA stretch target of 75 per cent. It lacks robust data about private sector stock compared to vulnerable households. Too many people are still living in poor quality homes.
- 162** The Council has not been proactive in licensing houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). Information from planning and council tax records has identified 170 possible HMOs but so far only two have been licensed, six are in progress and 30 are being followed up as potentially requiring licences. Some vulnerable people living in HMOs may be living in inadequate or even dangerous properties.
- 163** The aids and adaptations service is generally effective. The Council has increased the budgets needed to provide mandatory disabled facilities grants (DFGs). Council occupational therapists (OTs) work with health service OTs where necessary and assess 83 per cent of non-emergency work within 28 days. The Home Improvement Agency (HIA) provides a handyperson service and gives advice to people who need larger works. The Council's repairs contractor does all small scale adaptations (up to £1,000) across all tenures. There is no waiting list for adaptations and smaller adaptations are completed within seven days.
- 164** The Council is amongst the best council performers for the percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days. Customer satisfaction scores highly at 8.94 out of 10. However, larger adaptations take an average of 26 weeks to commence from receipt of an OT assessment. The Council is not measuring the full time it takes for adaptations from the date reported to when work is completed in a way that can be used to assess the effectiveness of the service both individually and generally for customers. It is not effectively monitoring work. Overall, adaptations work is positive and between 2006 and 2010 there has been a 25 per cent reduction in hospital admissions. As a result of this work vulnerable people who need aids and adaptations are helped to live independently in their homes.
- 165** The Council is working with other sub-regional councils to provide a mixture of ways to provide adaptations. This includes a North-East wide loan and equity release scheme. A loans administrator has been appointed. This will expand the range of people who are helped, as currently only those who qualify for a grant are helped.
- 166** Outcomes from working more closely with private landlords are just developing. The Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS) is well received by landlords. Landlords' perceptions of policies to address ASB, tackle empty homes, and bring homes up to decent homes levels are seen as either irrelevant or hampered by bureaucracy. Landlords are not generally prepared to take advantage of Warm Zone unless tenants on benefits qualify for total help with the costs. Landlords are not yet helping deliver improved outcomes for their tenants and strategic housing objectives.

167 The Council has limited information about the impact and outcomes of its work with the private housing sector. DGS has provided around 100 new tenancies, but this is not compared to demand, or to how many of these tenancies are being sustained. The Council lacks information on outcomes from landlord accreditation, HMO licensing, the work of the landlord forum, private sector decent homes work, or how fast-tracking has facilitated private landlord's access to other council services such as housing benefit. It lacks data about outcomes from its financial assistance policy and the NE Regional Loans Scheme. The Council has identified few outcomes from the current private sector housing strategy and is not able to demonstrate its performance, challenge current practice and use information to make improvements.

Are the housing needs of vulnerable and lower income households being met effectively?

168 The Council is performing adequately in this area. People in housing need, including those with diverse needs, receive suitable advice and are dealt with appropriately. Customers have access to a range of housing options through the choice-based letting system, including nominations to housing associations. Preventing homelessness is improving and the use of temporary accommodation is reducing. Temporary accommodation units are well run. The Council works with partners to reduce antisocial behaviour. A range of supported housing helps vulnerable people to live more independently. But it is not always easy to access council services. The impact and quality of support services, and comparison with identified needs, are not routinely assessed. Support for people experiencing domestic violence is still developing.

169 People in housing need receive suitable advice, and are signposted to a range of options to meet their needs. The Housing Options team helps to prevent homelessness. It works alongside the Homefinder team to provide a joined-up service, managed by North Tyneside Homes. The service is accessible and staff are well trained. All operational council staff and partners are trained in safeguarding vulnerable groups. The team uses the homeless prevention toolkit and offers same day interviews and surgery appointments in three other service centres. It has prevented 277 people from becoming homeless since October 2009.

170 Customers using the homeless' services report that they are supported at all stages, from the first approach to ongoing support to help them to sustain their tenancies. Support plans identify issues and are used to signpost customers to other agencies. A Youth Homelessness Prevention Officer develops a support plan for all 16 to 17 year olds who contact Housing Options. The Council has doubled the number of 18 to 21 year old care leavers securing tenancies from 14 to 28 since May 2009ⁱ. In general vulnerable young people are supported to gain the confidence and skills necessary to secure and sustain independent living.

ⁱ North Tyneside maintains a caring obligation to 16-17 year old people who are looked after, for example through fostering, until they are 18 years old.

Report

- 171** Outcomes are improving from developing a joined-up approach with the Housing Benefits team. Housing Benefits use discretionary housing payments (DHPs) to cover the gap between rents and the local reference rent. Benefit staff have started to attend the landlord's forum and assist applications for Housing Benefit. However, there has been limited take up of this service as yet with most landlords preferring to approach the private sector/DGS team to get benefit sorted out.
- 172** The Council proactively develops initiatives across the sub-region. It helped to fund and championed one organisation's proposal to set up a 'night stop' scheme in Tyne and Wear to help young people faced with homelessness. Leadership helps to broaden services for homeless and potentially homeless people.
- 173** However, it is not always easy for customers to access council services. We found mixed results from reality checks during this inspection. Local offices on direct dial numbers are answered quickly. Telephone operators are friendly, identify themselves and are helpful. However, enquiries were rarely resolved at the first point of call - many enquiries are passed to other agencies or departments, or require call-backs. Positively, promises to call-back with information were always met within the agreed timescale. The last residents' survey found that customer's experience when contacting the Council has deteriorated. Only 71 per cent found staff helpful compared to 76 per cent in 2007; only 66 per cent found it easy to get hold of the right person, compared to 68 per cent in 2007; and only 54 per cent were satisfied with the final outcome, compared to 58 per cent in 2007. Customers may not receive the advice and help they may need.
- 174** The Council helps people with diverse needs. It achieves level three of the Equality Standard for Local Government (September 2009) and is classed as 'achieving' under the Equality Framework for Local Government. Outcomes from equality schemes include a more inclusive website, issuing information in alternative formats when needed, and making office reception areas more accessible following access audits. The Council is working with partners to develop reporting mechanisms for hate crime across the sub-region. A sub-regional web-based hate crime monitoring and management system is being trialled and is due to be launched in July 2010.
- 175** People in housing need have an increasing range of options through the choice-based letting system (CBL). The new system, Homefinder, and allocations policy were operational from January 2010. The number on the list increased from 3,027 to 3,181 after re-assessment. The CBL system is accessible and easy to understand. The scheme operates using the Council's priority banding systemⁱ, although housing associations can maintain their own lettings policy.

ⁱ CLG guidance advises that simple banding schemes more easily explain to customers how housing applications are prioritised

- 176** Currently, housing associations do not make all lettings through the scheme. Households taking up nominations to housing association homes doubled from under 100 in 2004/05 to over 200 in 2008/09. The Council has recognised the need to monitor nominations through CBL and is developing a framework with housing associations to do this. However, the Council is not yet robustly monitoring performance keeping to nomination agreements (100 per cent for new build and from 50 per cent for all other lettings). Accredited private landlords were able to join the scheme from May/June 2010. The Council employs two OTs to help people requiring adapted homes find suitable properties. Although it is still developing, the CBL service offers residents more choice and makes it easier to access homes to meet their needs.
- 177** The Council is working with housing associations to develop the CBL scheme, including for low cost home ownership. It is developing a sub-regional CBL system (target October 2011) - a regional mutual exchange scheme already exists. It will act as a gateway to each of the Councils' existing schemes, with households across the sub-region able to access the individual websites through one point using the same application form.
- 178** Homelessness prevention is improving. In 2008/09 907 people presented as homeless, with 20 per cent of those (181) being given advice and support to prevent homelessness. In 2009/10 this had improved to 41 per cent of applications being successfully addressed (311 cases from 757 applications). Several schemes have improved the approach to preventing homelessness. This includes Homefinder, the Bond scheme and partnership working with specialist organisations. Since January 2010, 20 vulnerable people have been supported and given priority through Homefinder to prevent homelessness.
- 179** The Council has successfully completed three mortgage rescues (the first in the North-East). In 2009/10, 311 cases of homelessness were prevented compared to 181 in the previous year. This includes 44 homelessness cases prevented by mediation, 36 through fast track allocation and 39 through facilitating entry to private sector housing. Through the Deposit Guarantee Scheme the Council has re-housed over 100 potentially homeless people in two years (bringing empty homes back into use). Preventing homelessness helps vulnerable people to live in more secure homes.
- 180** The Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS) with landlords is effective. All landlords taking part are accredited. Landlords are very pleased with service they receive. This includes the helpfulness of staff, the attitude of tenants found for them, and the support they and their tenants receive. Support includes fast-tracking Housing Benefit claims and automatic direct payments. However, the Council is not yet measuring its performance in supporting landlords. Landlords are keen to expand the scheme. The scheme allows the Council to help people in housing need, improve standards in the private rented sector and use the private rented sector to expand housing choice in the Borough.

Report

- 181** The Council is developing support initiatives with partners to prevent homelessness and help vulnerable people find suitable accommodation. A service level agreement with one partner organisation prevents rough sleeping. An integrated resettlement service with the Youth Justice Board helps young offenders find settled accommodation. Joint working between the youth offending team and the partner organisation helps to support young offenders coming out of custody through three resettlement flats.
- 182** The Council is developing 'trainer flats' for care leavers and is increasing housing provision for pregnant care leavers through the housing waiting list, the number housed increased from 14 to 28 homes in the last year. The furnished tenancies scheme offers a choice of furniture packs in around 700 homes. Ninety four per cent of tenants are satisfied with the furniture provided and no one was dissatisfied. Support helps vulnerable people to manage and sustain their independence. Tenancy failure reduced from 11.3 per cent in 2008/09 to 9 per cent in 2009/10.
- 183** Reliance on temporary accommodation is reducing. The Council has met the government target to halve numbers in temporary accommodation from 86 in 2005, numbers had peaked at 100 in September 2008, to only 33 households in June 2010. Bed and breakfast accommodation has not been used since August 2008. Plans for a 'Gateway to services' is central to the Council's strategic objective to develop independence and address homelessness. This will further reduce temporary accommodation costs. The Council intends to close all current hostels, develop new hostel accommodation for groups that need it, like pregnant teenagers, and provide floating support for those who need less intensive support. Vulnerable people are helped to find more secure, permanent homes and are less likely to need more costly interventions from other agencies.
- 184** Temporary accommodation is managed effectively by the in-house team. The temporary accommodation handbook is clearly written and useful. It sets out what those entering temporary accommodation can expect from the service in plain English. The quality of accommodation is high, with good-sized and well maintained self contained flats. Suitable support and intervention is provided for children living in temporary accommodation. During 2008/09, 171 school age children used this service. Health visitors ensure that customers have access to doctors and midwives. During 2009 there were 225 initial contacts with customers. The Council is also looking to develop a single system for accessing housing related support or temporary accommodation. Vulnerable people receive suitable support until they find permanent homes.
- 185** A cross tenure approach deals with low level antisocial behaviour (ASB). 'Child Safe' focuses on children out at night. They are taken to a safe place by the Police and offered diversionary activities. Other initiatives include target hardening and extra lighting where people feel exposed to risk. The Council's Safer Estates Team works closely with the Police in a highly publicised cross-tenure approach tackling antisocial behaviour. As part of Operation Respect early morning visits to households warn them about their behaviour, putting tenancies at risk and about possible future action.

- 186** The Supporting People (SP) programme has increased housing support for vulnerable people. It has substantially increased the number of short-term service users from 419 in 2007/08 to 995 in 2008/09. It funds a Refugee Integration Service which has privately rented 16 properties (furnished accommodation), and the Council secured £111,400 per annum from Government Office to support a 'migration' project. Supporting People procurement has increased the number of floating support units across all client groups and tenures from 701 to 809, with no increase in the cost of service. An increased number of vulnerable people, with diverse needs, are helped to receive the housing related support they need.
- 187** The Council has demonstrated its commitment to maintaining SP funding for vulnerable people. The eligibility structure for funding has been reviewed to focus on outcomes, concentrating on the service rather than how it is accessed. This has led to the development of the Gateway to services associated with the Options Team.
- 188** The Council performs well compared to other councils on some national indicators (NIs) for housing support. It is among the best 25 per cent of performers for NI 141, the number of vulnerable people achieving independent living, at 86.8 per cent; NI 143, offenders under probation supervision living in settled and suitable accommodation at the end of their order or licence, at 82.4 per cent; and NI 187, tackling fuel poverty, with 34.5 per cent of people on benefits in homes with a high energy efficiency rating.
- 189** A range of options help older people get the type of accommodation they need. The previous section outlined the adaptations service. The Quality Homes for Older People scheme will refurbish 16 existing sheltered schemes and replace the rest with 10 new sheltered schemes. The Council has recently provided two high quality extra schemes comprising 108 apartments, including 21 for shared ownership and 4 adapted bungalows. Joint working with the NHS helps to maintain zero delayed discharge performance, and has reduced the number of older people entering residential care by 4 per cent in 2009/10 with a total reduction of 25 per cent since 2006.
- 190** Suitable support for vulnerable families in transitory accommodation is developing. Sub-regional councils use a number of properties to house families and young people on a short-term basis. The Council facilitates seminars to raise awareness of safeguarding issues and share information across council departments and with other organisations. The scheme is new and the linked health visitor and teacher regularly check establishments to offer help, and liaise with the placing local authority where necessary. All unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller pitches are visited by an environmental health officer to identify intentions and any support needs. Travellers generally only stay a few days, but a teacher is available if families are staying longer. The Council has not had to take any enforcement action.

- 191** There are some weaknesses with services to support vulnerable people. The Council is not robustly assessing the quality of some support services and how services meet identified needs. For example, it is not currently evaluating the quality of sheltered housing services in its own landlord service, North Tyneside Homes, and in housing associations. It lacks evidence of how supported housing providers are targeting services to meet identified needs. Short-term Supporting People services have not benefitted from external assessment. The last time housing support coordinators, the homeless hostels and the refugee integration unit were assessed was in 2007. Without regular, robust assessment the Council and vulnerable customers do not know how effective housing support services are and the value for money that is being achieved.
- 192** The Council and its partners provide adequate, but limited, support for those experiencing domestic violence. The options team work in partnership with relevant organisations and the Council's public protection unit through a MARACⁱ to help people experiencing from domestic violence. The Council proactively provides protection through the Sanctuary schemeⁱⁱ, and re-houses people through fast track arrangements. The Sanctuary scheme has helped people at risk of violence to stay in their homes. Between 2006 and 2009, 60 properties have been secured, allowing 52 customers to stay in their homes. This reduces the number of households found to be homeless - previously 20 per cent of homeless cases were as a result of domestic violence. People suffering domestic violence are now dealt with outside the homelessness process.
- 193** The Council recognises there are problems with existing provision of accommodation for survivors of domestic violence and is developing a new refuge with a specialist provider. The current refuge is not suitable. The accommodation provided means residents share facilities and the service provides insufficient support to help residents to move-on. The Council is not meeting its target of one refuge place per 10,000 of population. In 2008/09, 105 survivors of domestic violence accessed supported housing accommodation, with 76 housed through the refuge. However, in the same time period the police recorded 2,205 incidents of people at risk or fleeing domestic violence, with 126 classed as high risk, and 75 classed as very high risk.
- 194** The Council recognises these weaknesses in domestic violence services and is putting into place measures that will address them. New provision will increase capacity from 8 to 14 units. This will be supplemented by increased use of floating support, Sanctuary schemesⁱⁱⁱ and the development of choice-based lettings, helping survivors to effectively move on from emergency accommodation. The provision of a new refuge and associated support will ensure that there is adequate support for those who have escaped domestic violence.

ⁱ MARAC - The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference provides a coordinated community response to domestic abuse

ⁱⁱ Sanctuary projects are designed to enable victims to stay in their own homes where this is possible and desired

ⁱⁱⁱ It is intended to increase the number of properties in the sanctuary scheme from four to six units.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

- 1 Indicators included in this section are considered to be relevant as evidence in reviewing improvement and current performance in relation to balancing housing markets, existing house conditions and homelessness.

Table 1 Developing new homes and balancing housing markets

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	Direction of Travel (↑ = improving)	National ranking 2008/09
Total number of new homes developed (NI154 – net)	665 Gross (606 Net)	446 Gross (313 Net)	366 Gross (286 Net)	↓	Q3
Number of affordable homes delivered – gross (NI155)	23	80	189	↑	Q3
Percentage of net additional homes that are affordable	3.8%	25%	66%	↑	Q3
Total number of shared ownership or other forms of low cost home ownership completed	9	3	39	↑	Q4
Target percentage of affordable housing being required on-sites in excess of the threshold size	30%	30%	25%	N/A	N/A
Percentage on previously developed land	72%	77%	80%	↑	N/A
Target number of homes within regional plan	400	400	400	-	N/A
109a - Major planning apps processed in 13 weeks	73.00%	86.49%	53.13%	↓	N/A
Number of new supported housing units	8	9	19	↑	N/A

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Table 2 Homelessness and housing need

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	Direction of Travel (↑ = improving)	National ranking 2008/09
Number of homelessness applications	841	907	757	↑	N/A
Number of those threatened with homeless for whom advice and support prevented the occurrence of homelessness	246	181	311	↑	N/A
Number of homelessness acceptances	557	648	496	↑	Q4 (based per 1,000 population)
Number of families in B&B at 31 March	2	0	0	↑	N/A
Number of families in other temporary accommodation at 31 March	71	53	33	↑	Achieved target 50% reduction
Reduction in numbers of families placed in temporary accommodation	5.79%	1.12%	Not yet available	↑	N/A
Domestic Violence (homelessness cases accepted)	118	152	114	↑	N/A
NI141 vulnerable people achieving indep' living	89.03	86.75	86.00	↔	Q1
NI 142 vulnerable people supported to achieve independent living	96.94	98.25	98.20	↔	Q3
NI 187 Tackling fuel poverty - % of people receiving income based benefits living in homes with a high energy efficiency rating (%)		35	35	↔	Q2

Table 3 Improving existing housing

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	Direction of Travel (↑ = improving)	National ranking* 2008/09
Percentage of LA homes not meeting the decent homes standard	35%	24%	14%	↑	Q2
SAP rating for council homes	62	66.7	Not yet available	↑	Q3
Percentage of private sector homes that are unfit or in need of major repair	10%	9%	9%	↔	N/A
Number of minor works grants (DH renovation grants)	146 (57)	146 (52)	N/A	↔	N/A
Demolitions	0	8	N/A		N/A
Non-decent homes	18,392	24,211	N/A	↓	N/A
Percentage non-decent homes made fit/demolished	1.1%	0.9%	N/A	↔	N/A

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	Direction of Travel (↑ = improving)	National ranking* 2008/09
Percentage home unfit or in need of major repair	10%	9%	9%	↔	Q3
Percentage of private sector homes occupied by vulnerable people that do not meet the decent homes standard	47%	40%	40%	↔	N/A
Number of vacant homes returned to use	155	102	105	↔	N/A
Number of private sector homes vacant for six months or longer	584	1025	898	↑	Q2
Number of households helped through grants to improve thermal efficiency/affordable warmth	1566	5323	4123	↓	N/A
SAP rating for the private sector housing stock	49	Owner Occupier - 66.81 Private Rented - 66.11	Owner Occupier - 66.81 Private Rented - 66.11	↔	Q2
Number of HMOs that meet the HH and SRS standard following intervention	14	4	Not yet available	↓	N/A

Source: North Tyneside Council performance reports

* Q1 = top 25 per cent performance metropolitan councils 2008/09

Q2 = above average

Q3 = below average

Q4 = bottom 25 per cent performance

Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
 - focus groups with staff and partners;
 - interviews with staff, councillors, partners and key stakeholders;
 - tour of the district;
 - visits to affordable housing developments;
 - viewing temporary and supported accommodation;
 - various file checks; and
 - review of council documents.

Appendix 3 – Positive practice

Thermal imaging aerial surveys

- 1 Aerial thermal imaging provides an accurate assessment of heat loss from every house in the area. Thermal imaging will extend the work of 'Warm Zone' which has already provided 10,493 insulation measures (value of £2,456,212), giving estimated annual fuel bill savings of £1,415,992. Work has also secured £2,352,524 in additional means tested benefits for 800 households.
- 2 North Tyneside Council, in partnership with two neighbouring authorities jointly commissioned aerial thermal image surveys of the boroughs. A thermographic survey graphically illustrates the problems towns and cities face trying to cut costs and conserve energy. Digital thermal maps are used with the councils' GIS systems. Information is used to:
 - help 'Warm Zone' teams to identify the remaining areas to target insulation work;
 - overlay Council Tax and Housing Benefit data to identify vulnerable households to prioritise 'Warm Zone' surveys;
 - identifying properties which may have a category 1 hazard for excess cold under the HHSRSⁱ, or fail the decent homes standard on one of the other criteria for thermal comfort; and
 - identify potential group repair/insulation schemes.

Knowledge Transfer Partnership

- 3 The Knowledge Transfer Partnership with Northumbria University employs two research associates, giving specialist advice on efficiency standards, renewable energy systems and enhancing design. The project aims to develop expertise in the Council to enhance the design and longevity of new built and refurbished sheltered housing accommodation. Work has provided benefits for the PFI project - Quality Homes for Older People, and has influenced other service areas. Benefits include:
 - a heat insulation programme to sheltered schemes which should provide £50,000 per annum saving on energy costs prior to the PFI Project (this work will be rolled-out to council properties that use communal boilers);
 - investigating the installation of energy intelligence units that could give potential savings of over £100,000 per annum from reduction in energy costs on inefficient boilers;

ⁱ HHSRS – Housing Health and Safety Rating System – measures unfitnes

Appendix 3 – Positive practice

- carbon savings of 471 tonnes per annum has been achieved through efficiency measures (a reduction of 11 per cent). It is estimated that following completion of the project a further 30 per cent of savings will be achieved; and
- design and sustainability evaluation tools will enable the Council to objectively measure the quality of submissions by each bidder competing for the Quality Homes for Older People Project (and other future schemes).

Development team approach to delivering new affordable housing

- 4 A 'one council' approach with housing association partners was set up to improve performance on delivering new affordable homes. Development meetings cover existing and potential schemes and ensure a coordinated approach to addressing issues. The meetings not only cover schemes currently on-site. Monthly meetings are hosted by the housing strategy team and are attended by relevant council officers depending on the stage(s) of development. This includes valuers, land managers, planners and engineers.
- 5 This approach has speeded up developments and has helped to secure higher levels of NAHPⁱ funding. The level of NAHP funding increased from £2 million between 2006 and 2008, to £16.5 million from 2008 to 2011. This supports an increase in delivery of affordable homes from 41 to 283 over the same periods.

ⁱ NAHP – National Affordable Housing Programme from the HCA (Homes and Community Agency)

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