Oldham and Rochdale Housing Strategy 2012–15: Progress on Oldham actions
1. **Background**

This update outlines progress on Oldham-specific actions in the ‘Oldham and Rochdale Housing Strategy 2012-15’.

2. **Introduction**

The joint strategy with Rochdale (our former Housing Market Renewal partner) was approved in April 2012 and is based around five priority issues:

- Supporting development which meets economic need
- Making best use of existing homes
- Addressing fuel poverty
- Preventing homelessness and supporting communities
- Improving neighbourhoods

The strategy provides a framework to support other housing themed delivery plans relating to homelessness, affordable housing, private sector housing and affordable warmth. It also links in to other key council initiatives such as ‘Invest in Oldham’ and ‘Get Oldham Working’.

The Council has an excellent track record on housing and won Strategic Local Authority of the year at the UK Housing Awards in June 2012 for its strong and successful partnership working.

Many of the achievements highlighted below also contribute towards Oldham becoming a Co-operative Borough and Repositioning Oldham. These include:

- Managing demand for services
- Changing the way we deliver services
- Working together
- Transforming our business

3. **Progress to date**

A summary of key achievements in the last 18 months are set out below -

3.1 **Supporting development that meets economic need**

We've supported developers to secure ‘Get Britain Building’ funding to kickstart over 125 new homes on 3 schemes in Saddleworth that have stalled as a result of the economic downturn.

We've worked with Keepmoat to ensure 165 homes in Derker and 80 homes in Fitton Hill are now being built.

We're expecting planning applications for over 460 homes before Christmas.
Since April 2012, almost 250 high-quality new affordable homes were completed. This includes around 20 specially adapted houses.

In the next 2 years, over 400 new affordable homes will be built. Many of our new-build homes are being developed to superior design standards, including the first ‘passivhaus’ properties in the North West. St Mary’s development (93 homes) was awarded the RTPI North West Planning Achievement award for 2013.

First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) are ahead of target in their £149m investment programme on homes, neighbourhoods and services since housing stock transfer from the Council. It is estimated that 45% of their budget is spent locally.

3.2 Making better use of existing homes

Through our Award-winning Downsizing Scheme, we helped free-up over 250 larger family houses since 2009. Our managing agent, AKSA, is bringing 75 more empty homes back in to use across the borough and Great Places are working with the Council to convert 33 homes for larger affordable housing in South Werneth. We’re selling 38 long term empty homes in South Werneth under licence to residents, who will refurbish them to a high standard. Following a detailed review, enforcement and other activity, we’ve reduced the numbers of long-term empty homes between 2011 and 2012 by over 300 to 1,494 and are on course to reduce this further. We’re taking tough action on poor-quality privately rented homes and dealt with 279 cases in 2012/13, with 95% of landlords immediately complying. Our partners, FCHO, spend £1m per year for on aids and adaptations and are completing around 200 adaptations a year to support disabled tenants.
Our partners have set up a Tenancy Liaison Service to help keep tenants in Private Rented Sector in their home.

3.3 Addressing fuel poverty and energy efficiency

We agreed the first community budget scheme in the country (payment by results) around fuel poverty and secured £200k from Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group, Oldham Housing Investment Partnership and the Council to commission a new fuel poverty service this year. Keepmoat are working with us on a range of initiatives to lift 1,000 people out of fuel poverty by March 2014.

In 2012/13, over £5 million was invested in affordable warmth, with over 7,500 energy efficiency measures installed and over 550 vulnerable residents given support out of fuel poverty. Oldham launched the UK’s third ‘Collective Energy Switching’ campaign. 8,726 residents ended up signing up with average savings per household of £171.
Over 650 residents attended our Winter Health Event in 2012
We secured £190k for a replacement boiler scheme that provided 73 heating upgrades to vulnerable residents, 37 of these had no heating at all previously.
We also secured £90k to help residents stay safe and well during the cold winter months.
FCHO have completed over 1,000 boiler replacements and have also helped secure a £12m ECO scheme for St Marys.
A range of behavioural change programmes have been introduced such as ‘Beat the Chill’ and St Marys community champions.

3.4 Preventing Homelessness and supporting communities

There were only 62 homeless acceptances during 2012/13, (there were 961 cases in 2003/4).
Last year (2012/13), we prevented homelessness in over 1,600 cases.
Half of all new-build affordable homes are now being let through our ‘Working Xtra’ programme to support and reward residents involved in employment, training or volunteering opportunities by giving them priority access.
The Mortgage Rescue Scheme has helped 43 households to remain in their homes.
The Court Desk Service, which provides support and advice to those at risk of repossession, has helped 33 household since April 2012 - a 90% success rate.
We’ve set up a Common Allocations Framework and central access point to allow prospective tenants to self-service and ensure wider access to social housing.
FCHO have successfully introduced pre tenancy training, which has been shortlisted for a national award and is seen as model best practice.

3.5 Improving neighbourhoods

We were the first council in Greater Manchester to develop a Local Authority Mortgage Scheme (LAMS) with Lloyds TSB. In the first phase we’ve already helped 55 first-time-buyers in Oldham on to the housing market and recently invested a further £1M into extending the scheme. Through the Gateways to Oldham scheme, 4,896 weeks of training have been provided so far.

14 full and part time apprentices from the local community were employed at the St Mary’s development.

Since the stock transfer in March 2011, FCHO have invested £10.5 M into local communities.

Our housing providers work with partners to deliver a range of community initiatives including apprenticeships, volunteering programmes, Respect our Communities Award (Roca), New Innovations Fund (NIF), Health and well-being work, customer and community engagement through Forever Manchester and food growing initiatives.
4. Actions underway

Here’s a selection of what we are working on at the moment:

We’re developing a Residential Development Prospectus, which will set out how the Council will work with developers, builders, Registered Providers and others to increase the quantity, quality and choice of new homes (November 2013).

As part of the above approach, we will be encouraging more quality and well-managed private housing development and a wider choice of housing including new homes for private rent.

We’re in discussion with the Werneth Custom Build Association on plans to build 37 larger homes in South Werneth (December 2013).

We will be confirming with our housing partners the Co-operative offer for Housing. This includes confirming existing and planned activity around a ‘something for something’ approach to social housing including around housing allocations and behaviour.

We will be launching ‘Let’s Help You’ – a self-service website to support households to access the Private Rented Sector (December 2013).

We’re examining opportunities to introduce selective licensing for private landlords using a defined legal framework (December 2013).

We’re continuing to support and prevent those at risk of homelessness.

We will ensure effective delivery of key activity highlighted in our strategy and be flexible to future challenges.

There will continue to be excellent working with housing partners to advice and support communities, particularly around the impact of Welfare Reform.