



# Oldham Housing Partnership

June 2009 Newsletter

---

## Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of the Oldham Housing Partnership newsletter. Oldham Housing Partnership is a range of organisations, including the Council, elected members, housing associations and the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, who work together to improve housing for residents across the borough.

Our newsletter aims to give you a brief insight into some of the positive work which is being delivered through the Partnership.

## New Housing Strategy

### Housing Partnership sets out approach to making Oldham a better place to live

The Oldham Housing Strategy is being submitted to the Council's Cabinet on 10 June. It will help the Council and its partners attract more resources and sets priorities to improve the quantity and quality of housing available and improve access to housing.

The strategy has been developed following consultation with a range of people ensuring that it reflects the needs and demands of people and services from across the borough.

The following themes are set out in the new strategy -

- Achieving the right quantity of housing
- Continuing to raise the quality of the existing and future housing stock
- Connecting People to an improved housing offer

For further information please contact: [nick.cumberland@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:nick.cumberland@oldham.gov.uk)

## Downsizing project makes a move

An innovative project is benefitting a number of families across Oldham as the Downsizing project takes off.

The project offers people living in houses which are too big for their need, the opportunity to downsize to a smaller property. This helps to reduce the pressures of maintaining a larger home, and gives a family living in overcrowded accommodation the opportunity to move into a larger home.

The project was only started at the end December 2008 and by May 2009, 25 larger homes had been made available for families to move into, including one five bed house. Fifteen of the homes had three bedroom or more.

Four of the fifteen houses which have currently been re-let as a result of the downsizing project, have gone to families who were living in overcrowded accommodation.



## Oldham secures funding to help tackle overcrowding

Oldham Council has been chosen to join a government pathfinder programme to look at reducing overcrowding in the borough.

£90,000 of funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government will enable us to focus on reducing the number of overcrowded households in Oldham.

We are one of only 22 councils outside of London chosen to be a part of the pathfinder. The funding will allow the Council to continue developing several innovative initiatives, including the successful downsizing scheme (highlighted on page 1).

It will also enable us and our partners to look at other initiatives that can help reduce overcrowding in Oldham such as a more comprehensive housing options service for both under-occupied and overcrowded households.

Cabinet Member for Community Services and Housing, Councillor John McCann said: "Oldham's involvement in the pathfinder is recognition of the fantastic work already being done by the Housing Strategy Team and our local housing partners to help reduce overcrowding. With the additional funding, we will be able to continue this work and develop new initiatives to further reducing the number of overcrowded households in Oldham."

### Development Update

#### Credit crunch fails to stop new affordable housing developments

##### Oliver Court, Suthers Street

Despite all of the doom and gloom surrounding the credit crunch, 19 new houses and eight flats were completed at the end of March 2009. This is excellent news for Oldham with an additional 27 houses being available for affordable rent. Regenda, in partnership with Keepmoat, completed the development of Oliver's Court, Suthers Street, containing a mix of three, four and five bedroom houses and two bedroom flats.



##### Bryon Green, £4.7m council housing boost!

The foundations have been laid for new affordable homes to be built in Oldham. Bryon Green, Hollinwood, is the site as a £4.7m scheme to build affordable housing is pioneered in the borough. A total of 32 new two, three and four-bedroom homes will be bought in partnership with First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) from builders McInerney Homes. FCHO is also buying up five empty former council houses as part of the same scheme to bring them up to Decent Homes Standard. The Council agreed prudential borrowing to support a bid to the Homes and Communities Agency to fund the homes.

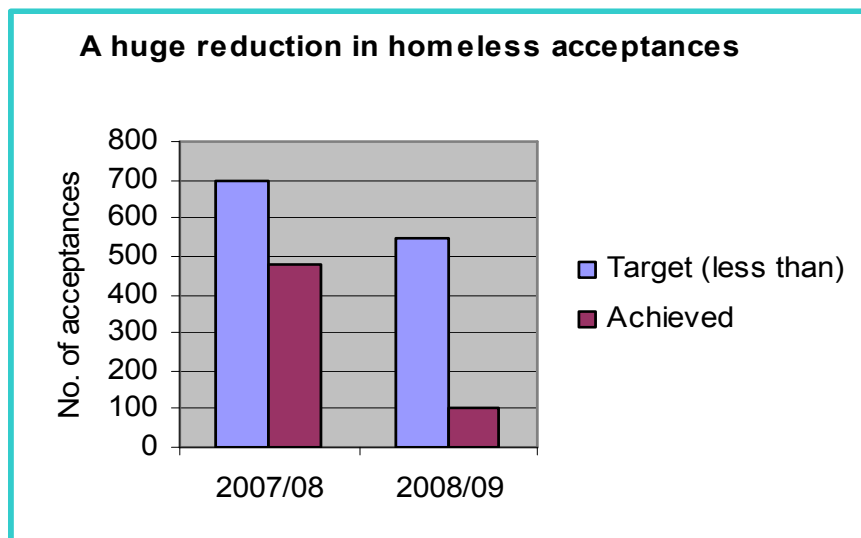
Harry Burns, chairman of First Choice Homes Oldham, said: "I'm delighted that we're able to work with the council to provide 37 much-needed family homes."

## Homelessness down

### Huge reductions in homeless acceptances

Oldham Housing Partnership has continued to make excellent progress in its bid to reduce the number of homeless people. In the final quarter, January to March 2009, there were only 15 homeless acceptances, making a total of 104 for the year. This is an excellent achievement, significantly below the target of 500 for the year and a massive reduction on the 478 acceptances in 2007/08. The primary reason for this has been the increased focus on

the prevention of homelessness through a wide range of initiatives. 1,089 cases of homelessness were prevented during 2008/09 as a result of the initiatives.



### We've stopped using temporary bed and breakfast accommodation

Not one person has been placed in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation since June 2008. This is fantastic news as a result of some excellent work being undertaken through First Choice Homes Oldham, the Council and Oldham Housing Partnership. In total, just 42 households were placed in B&B in 2008/09. This was significantly better than the target of no more than 200 placements and a huge improvement on the 231 placements in 2007/08. This saved £66,000 of Council money.

For further information please contact: [ann-marie.mcjinn@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:ann-marie.mcjinn@oldham.gov.uk)

### Accessible new home

#### Innovative project provides accessible accommodation

A disabled person and their family have been offered a new accessible home thanks to innovative work by the Council and First Choice Homes Oldham.

The property which the family will move into had been bought by a former tenant under the Right to Buy scheme and benefitted from significant adaptations. For various reasons, it was then advertised for sale and remained empty. As we are actively targeting empty properties and are in desperate need for suitably adapted properties, the decision was made to buy it back. Works have now been carried out on the property to bring it up to Decent Homes Standard.

Both the purchase and the works have been funded using monies from a private developer in Saddleworth as part of their legal responsibility to provide affordable housing in the area. This is the first time that the Council has been able to use such monies to buy back a former Right to Buy property and then rent it to someone in need.

Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Services Cllr John McCann said: "The tenant offered this property lives in unsuitable accommodation, which cannot be adapted to meet their needs. By working in this way we have used scarce resources to bring a property back into use, to help meet the needs of a disabled person and ensure that the previous investment in this house in terms of adaptations has not been wasted."

## **Partners raise awareness of sheltered housing**

### **Pilot project to link BME older people into sheltered housing**

In April, Housing 21 and Council officers held an open day to "showcase" some newly refurbished bungalows on Villiers Drive and Shield Close in Coppice. Six of the properties would be available through Choice Based Lettings. The idea behind the day was to highlight the option of sheltered housing to the BME community. The location of the properties was considered ideal, as it is within an established Asian community.



The event was successful in raising awareness and highlighted a number of issues and opportunities for attracting BME people into sheltered accommodation. Findings included:

- Older BME residents were mainly interested in schemes in their immediate neighbourhood
- More awareness raising of sheltered and extra care housing opportunities was required within the BME community
- There is a need for support to overcome language barriers and make the bidding process easier

For further information please contact: [tim.english@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:tim.english@oldham.gov.uk)

## **Mortgage Rescue**

### **Council volunteers to be a fast track authority for mortgage rescue scheme**

Oldham volunteered to be a 'fast track' authority for the Government new mortgage rescue scheme. We are working in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) to deliver the scheme. A free phone number has been established within FCHO which enables any households who are at risk of repossession to fast track for debt and housing advice. If the debt cannot be resolved by other means, eligible households are then referred into the mortgage rescue.

The free phone number (**0800 954 2789**) has been specifically marketed to all households in the borough, irrespective of tenure, whose home may be at risk.

To date a total of 73 households have accessed this service. All of the households who have contacted us have been offered support and advice and nine of these are actively being considered for the mortgage rescue scheme.

We are currently working very closely with our partners, three households have received mortgage rescue offers, and we expect to deliver package in the next few weeks.

## **More news**

We hope you found the new style Oldham Housing Partnership newsletter useful. We will aim to produce a short quarterly newsletter to keep you updated on developments. If you have any stories, you would like to see included, please contact us at the details below.

### **Contact**

Nick Cumberland on 0161 770 5261 or email [nick.cumberland@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:nick.cumberland@oldham.gov.uk)