

Draft foreword to the Housing Strategy by Watford's Elected Mayor.

Welcome to Watford's new Housing Strategy and Action Plan.

Housing is one of our biggest challenges in Watford. We have exceeded our housing delivery targets, yet Watford is a town of high house prices and high rents with a comparatively low supply of land to build on. Therefore we must make the most of all available resources and opportunities to deliver the best housing offer we can for our town.

Our Housing Strategy and Action Plan for 2015 to 2020 sets out our plans. These plans involve improving the supply of new homes, improving the condition of the homes which we already have, introducing special initiatives to meet needs in particular areas, and ensuring that an excellent housing offer contributes to good health, a thriving economy and well-being among our residents.

Watford is a lively and attractive town with excellent shopping, leisure and cultural facilities. It is also a popular place to work and do business. As a result, lots of people wish to live here. Many people who already live here are also seeking a home of their own in the town. Consequently, there is high demand for housing in the borough. Housing needs and aspirations range from those who have moved to Watford to take up employment opportunities and wish to live near their place of work., those who want to move to a home which is more suitable for their families' needs, to those who have become homeless and require an offer of accommodation urgently.

We are facing both challenges and opportunities. The Localism Act 2011 has produced big changes to the way social housing is allocated, the types of tenancies which are offered and the ways that homeless households are assisted. The Energy Act 2011 sets out a new framework to achieve energy

efficiency measures for both homes and businesses. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 is introducing radical changes to the system of welfare benefits. The system of funding the development of new affordable homes has changed significantly since 2010. However, there is large potential to attract housing-related funding and investment to our town. This strategy aims to maximize these opportunities for the benefit of Watford's residents.

Our Housing Strategy aims to address a wide spectrum of housing needs and aspirations. We will be undertaking an ambitious agenda of activity to make Watford's housing offer excellent. This will include tasks such as working closely with registered providers to increase the supply of affordable housing, introducing initiatives to promote home energy efficiency, implementing street improvement projects to improve neighbourhoods, and developing a communications strategy to provide better information on housing options. More broadly, we will undertake housing activities to improve health, economic development and well-being in Watford.

We have worked extensively to involve as many people as possible in developing our new Housing Strategy and Action Plan. We would like to thank everyone whose views and recommendations have helped to shape our plans. We very much value our relations with partner organizations, and we look forward to working with them to turn this Housing Strategy into action.