



WARRINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HOUSING OPTIONS APPRAISAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Warrington Borough Council owns and through an ALMO (Golden Gates Housing - GGH) manages approximately 9000 properties, comprising flats, bungalows and houses.
- 1.2 In order to ensure that the borough council is making best use of this asset, and that tenants are receiving the best possible services, the borough council is undertaking an investigation into the possible options for future management and ownership of these properties. This process is known as Housing Options Appraisal (HOA).
- 1.3 The government expects that while it is the responsibility of the borough council to undertake a Housing Options Appraisal, it must ensure that all individuals and organisations with an interest in the future of the council's housing stock are given the fullest opportunity to contribute to this process if they wish to do so.
- 1.4 The purpose of this strategy is, therefore, to set out how these stakeholders will be consulted, informed and involved in the Housing Options Appraisal process.
- 1.5 In addition to this document, GGH already has in place a Tenant Involvement Strategy (TIS), which sets out in greater detail how tenants and leaseholders of the Council are routinely involved in decisions which affect them. This communications strategy should be seen as complementary to the TIS and the Housing Options Appraisal process will therefore be undertaken with regard to both strategies.
- 1.6 A Housing Options Panel has been established, essentially as a working party to oversee and guide the process. This group comprises employees from GGH and council members from Warrington Borough Council, along with tenant representatives in equal number

2. Objectives

- 2.1 The main objectives of this strategy are to:

- Give all stakeholders a full opportunity to **learn about** the Housing Options Appraisal process
- Give all stakeholders a full opportunity to **express their views and opinions**
- Provide the support to stakeholders to help them learn about, comment on and **engage** in the process, where necessary. This will include taking part in the decision making process.
- Identify the **main priorities** for the different groups of stakeholders
- Use the most **appropriate method of communication**, depending upon the requirements of the stakeholder group concerned, ensuring that it is unbiased and timely.

3. Who are our stakeholders?

3.1 The key stakeholders in the Housing Options Appraisal Process are as follows (not listed in any priority order):

- Tenants and leaseholders
- Elected members
- Staff of Golden Gates Housing (GGH) whose work is involved with management of the council's housing stock.

3.2 While the above organisations and individuals have a direct interest in the future of the council's housing stock, other parties may also be interested in the issue, although perhaps less directly. This could include:

- Golden Gates Housing (GGH)
- GGH Board
- Registered social landlords with properties in the borough
- Other borough council staff
- The Warrington Partnership (LSP)
- The trade unions recognised by the borough council & GGH
- Government Office – North West

3.3 While there are many issues of concern or interest common to the different stakeholders, there will also be more specific matters, which will need to be considered and addressed separately. The communications strategy takes account of this point.

4. How will we achieve our objectives?

4.1.1 The main objectives of this strategy have already been identified in section 2 above. Set out below are further details of what needs to be done in order to achieve these objectives and, in turn, effective communication throughout the Options Appraisal process.

- 4.2 In order to provide stakeholders with a full opportunity to *learn about* the stock options appraisal process, we will:
- Publicise the issue widely.
 - Provide information on a regular basis.
- 4.3 In order for stakeholders to *express their views and opinions*, we will:
- Openly invite and encourage comment and feedback.
 - Ensure that stakeholders are aware of the opportunities available for participation in the process.
 - Have a robust system in place for recording comments received at any stage during the process.
- 4.4 To ensure that stakeholders can engage in the process, we will:
- Seek to identify, at the outset, any particular requirements that certain groups of stakeholders may have, which would restrict their ability to engage in the process.
 - Agree with stakeholders how best any barriers to being involved can be reasonably overcome.
 - Inform stakeholders how a final decision will be reached and provide a route for them to have an input to this decision-making process.
- 4.5 Identifying the main priorities of stakeholders is a further key objective of the communications strategy. This will be achieved by:
- Collating information from existing sources, which identify local priorities, issues and expectations.
 - Asking stakeholders to consider what, in terms of council housing, is important to them and how they wish to see services develop in the future.
 - Assisting stakeholders to explore how different options may, or may not help to achieve their stated priorities.
 - Ensuring that any consultation activity allows sufficient time for, and places sufficient focus on, exploring these wider issues.

4.6 The last objective is concerned with using appropriate methods of communication. Set out below is a summary of the methods available and comments about their potential use:

Method	Comment
Newsletters	A well accepted method of providing information to a targeted audience and requesting responses. However, not always a particularly interesting way of 'getting across the message' and may only be read by a limited audience.
Local press and radio	Provides access to a wide and general audience. Useful for highlighting or introducing an issue, or reporting achievements.
Face to face discussions	Provides a genuine opportunity for individuals to fully explore issues and make their views known. However, it is very time consuming and may only provide the views of an unrepresentative sample.
Briefing sessions	Useful for disseminating information and helping people to check their understanding of issues. Limited use in terms of providing comprehensive feedback.
Conferences	Provides an opportunity for stakeholders to engage in discussions so as to obtain a greater understanding of the issues and to give feedback.
Displays and exhibitions	Once again, useful as a source of information and to raise awareness. Can be used in a variety of locations
Telephone	Can be used to provide detailed information and tailored responses in relation to specific enquires.
Internet	Increasingly used method of making information publicly accessible. Scope for stakeholders to also use this format to register comments and queries.