

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In January 2008, Gateshead Council appointed **Outside Consultants** to produce a Housing Strategy for Young People backed up by a comprehensive study of the needs and aspirations of young people in the Borough.

The **first stage** research consisted of a sample survey of 1,030 young people, focus groups, interviews and a review of secondary data to identify the range of local housing choices, issues and needs of young people.

Following the publication of the research findings, further consultation took place with young people and stakeholders to develop the **second stage**: strategic issues and an action plan for young people that could be incorporated into existing strategies.

The key strategic objectives in relation to the housing needs of young people are:

- To develop a **strategy that complements and works together with other key strategy documents and policy initiatives** that have a bearing on young people including Gateshead's Children and Young People's Plan 2007/08, Every Child Matters - Change for Children, Youth Matters, Transitions, Young Adults with Complex Needs 2005, Supporting People, National Youth Homelessness Scheme
- To address a **wide range of housing related issues for all young people** aged 16 to 25 including, but not exclusively, the needs of vulnerable young people such as young homeless, young people from a local authority care background, young people who have experienced physical, sexual, emotional abuse and exploitation, young people with poor educational achievement, young people with mental health problems, young people involved in substance misuse, young people involved in offending and crime
- To consider a **wide range of housing options and improvements** to access and sustainability, in other words to help young people find appropriate housing that they are able to stay in it until ready to move on.
- To utilise a concept of a **housing continuum from cradle to grave**, where at the point when a young person moves from dependency to independent living, becoming homeless or unsuitably housed should not be an accepted part of that continuum
- To acknowledge that investing in **helping young people establish good stable homes and communities** will help to alleviate the next generations' housing needs and will help to keep young people in the Borough

- To acknowledge and build upon the findings from the Study of the Housing Needs and Aspirations of Young People 2008 and to establish a monitoring and review framework that will enable information on the housing needs and aspirations on young people to be maintained and updated
- To identify future and ongoing responsibility for the Young Persons Housing Strategy

CONTEXT

Currently, 55,300 people aged 0-24 living in Gateshead¹ of whom 28,600 (51.7%) are male and 26,700 (48.3%) are female.

- Young people make up 29.3% of Gateshead's population
- Over the last ten years the number of young people (0-24) in Gateshead has been fallen from 60,300 in 1995 to 56,300 in 2006 (down 6.6%). At the same time the number in the North East fell by 5.0%, whilst in Great Britain it grew by 0.8%.
- Young people aged 15-19 increased by 15.6% in Gateshead in the period whereas they increased by only 12.2% across the North East.
- 20-24 year olds in Gateshead fell by 7.9%, compared to growth of 4.5% in the North East and 2.4% in Great Britain.
- This pattern of reducing numbers of young people is set to continue for the next twenty years: number of people under 24 years old will fall by 8,300 (14.7%) in the Borough, whilst the population over 25 will increase by 2,500. In the initial ten year period 2009-2019 the decline will be 8.4% which is a greater rate than the period 1995-2006.

Unemployment/employment is a key determinant of housing choices for young people:

- 1997-2001, the unemployment rate for 16 to 24 year olds fell from 14% to 12%. It then stabilised until 2004, but since then it has been rising; reaching 15% in 2007.
- The unemployment rate for 16 to 24 year olds is now four times the rate for older workers. By contrast, a decade ago, it was just over twice the rate for older workers.
- After London, the North East is the region with the highest rate of youth unemployment
- Claimant count by ward in Gateshead: three wards Bridges (9.2%), Dunston & Teams (9.0%) and Felling (8.7%) have significantly higher proportions of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance. These three wards lie in two district sub-areas (Saltwell/Lobley

¹ Revised 2004 Mid-Year Population Estimates, ONS, 2007

Hill/Dunston Teams and Bridges/Deckham/Felling), which have the highest and the third highest concentrations of 16-24 year olds respectively.

In terms of mean house prices, Gateshead is consistently below sub-regional, regional and national averages.

- However, prices rose by 190.3% between 1996 and 2007, which is above the rate for Tyne and Wear and the North East.
- During the same period prices in Newcastle upon Tyne have risen by 214.4%.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The **two major determinants** of access to suitable housing are **age and income**. Young people inevitably have **lower incomes** (as they are in education, training or at the start of their working life) and **less housing experience**.

Consequently, although other factors impact upon young people's access to suitable housing (e.g. employment, education, location, disability, sexual orientation) and these need to be addressed, **the most fundamental issues** that determine housing choice are **age and income**.

Any actions to improve housing choices need to bear these two in mind at all times, since improvements to income or actions to address age inequalities will have a greater impact than almost anything else.

Lack of financial resources

- Young people lack the financial resources both **to move in the first place** and then having moved to be able to **afford to maintain a tenancy**.
- Young people have to spend a far **greater proportion of their income on housing** than other groups in the population and this creates significant financial pressure.
- Young people are often accommodated in properties that are too small for their needs, but they **lack the finances to afford larger more appropriate sized properties**.

Support to maintain tenancies

- The survey identified that a **quarter of young people did not know any details about their tenancy agreement**. Alongside the fact that they were attempting to maintain their tenancies on very low incomes there is a clear need for more support.

- Large numbers of young people **move between housing more frequently** compared with the rest of the population and many are accommodated in impermanent circumstances, moving between family/friends.

Supply of suitable housing

- Young people **want to stay in their localities** and show a preference for larger properties and for housing as opposed to flats, especially where they have children of their own.
- There are **issues to consider** about the impact of housing on families where members of a family network can be dispersed to inaccessible locations. Young women tend to be seen as the prime housing client and yet their **need to maintain contact with support networks**, male partners and the fathers of their children who may be living separately is not fully accounted for.
- **Social class plays a central role** in determining young people's housing transitions. Middle-class students **enjoy the most privileged pathways to independent living**, while early leavers from working-class backgrounds probably **experience the most challenging pathways**. There is much to be learnt from the supported transitions experienced by students, and a phased transition backed by access to support and advice provides a good model for young people more generally.
- **Gender plays a key role** also in determining young people's housing transitions, with the evidence² suggesting that
 - young women are more dominant on the waiting list and appear to be treated differently by social housing providers
 - young women hold stronger views about what they want from housing
 - young men and young women may need different types of housing

Size and type of housing

- There is a tendency to **assume that young people want to live on their own**. This is not the student experience, which provides a supported and managed transition to housing independence. In the survey **only 82 out of 1,055 young people were living as a single person household**. The average household size for young people living independently was 2.49.

² Appraisal of the Housing Needs and Aspirations of Young People, Gateshead Council, 2009

- Consequently, it may be that **one bedroom or bed-sit flats/apartments are not necessarily the best housing option** for young people and that forms of shared housing offer a more affordable and more supportive transition to independence.

Location of housing

- **Housing options**, along with employment, transport and training, are **more readily available in urban locations**. This requires young people living in rural areas to both move away from the family home earlier and further than they might otherwise desire or to stay living in the family home for longer.

Cost of housing

- The **housing costs associated with different tenures vary considerably**; social rented housing is the lowest, private rented housing tends to be the most expensive, owner occupation is prohibitive due to the need for significant deposits, reduced mortgage availability and high prices.
- Private renting is the most common tenure among 16-24 year olds.
- Young people spend far greater proportions of their income on their housing costs.

Information and advice

- There has been a lot of investment in improving housing advice and information services for young people and the quality, quantity and variety of services have been enhanced in the last couple of years. The most commonly used services are, the local housing office, local newspapers and estate agent's offices.
- Despite these advances, there remains room for further improvement; with over a **quarter of the young people saying they found it difficult to get advice, help or information about housing choices**.

Flexibility and freedom of movement

- Young people are **more likely to move from one home to another in relatively short time periods** than older more established households; flexibility and freedom of movement are important for some young people as they explore different housing options, jobs, education and relationships.
- One consequence of this **high turnover in housing for young people can be a detrimental impact on community stability and sustainability**.

Access to social rented housing

- There are significant differences between the numbers of young people in social rented housing and the numbers in the population, on the housing register and wanting social housing:
 - 14.0% of people over 16 in Gateshead are between the ages of 16 and 25³
 - 28.4% of all main applicants on the housing register are aged 16 and 25⁴
 - In the survey of young people, only 11.0% of young people wanted to move into owner occupation, 75.5% into socially rented accommodation and 12.5% into private rented accommodation⁵
 - According to Gateshead Housing Company around 5% of tenants are under 25

NEXT STEPS

Clear, well written strategy documents, are one part of an overall strategic process that provides a catalyst for change. Designing and delivering an effective strategic process therefore is as important as the production of the final documents.

The following outcomes from are needed from an effective strategic process:

- agreement on key issues and solutions
- a process of commitment from the top, throughout the organisation
- the review of existing data and research as a basis for consultation
- an inclusive consultation process bringing together, where possible, the client group, staff and partners and other stakeholders, and engendering ownership and opportunities for future development
- the identification of needs and aspirations, which seeks to address these using legislation as a driver
- an honest appraisal of the organisations/partners performance, through a clear analysis of the problems and options for solving them
- understandable, succinct strategy documents with clearly set out action plans with smart targets

³ Census 2001, UV04

⁴ Appraisal of the Housing Needs and Aspirations of Young People, Gateshead Council, 2009, p89

⁵ Appraisal of the Housing Needs and Aspirations of Young People, Gateshead Council, 2009, p80

- linkages made between all strategies, actions and targets
- a review of existing partnering arrangements and opportunities identified to form new partnering arrangements
- a communication plan for the implementation of the strategies
- a process for monitoring and evaluating progress both within the organisation and externally with customers and partners

To ensure that the outputs of the Housing Needs and Aspirations of Young People Study are taken forward, the findings need to be translated into objectives and an action plan that can be incorporated into other mainstream strategies and funding streams, with ownership and responsibility clearly identified.