

Housing, homes and neighbourhoods

Headlines

Decent, affordable and appropriate housing is increasingly needed to meet the current and longer term needs of people in Kirklees. There is also a significant shortfall in the number and suitability of homes needed for local residents, particularly given the rising number of elderly residents and people of all ages with a disability. There are also 5,000 empty homes in the area, mostly in the private sector, that need bringing back into use.

1 in 6 (16%) of homes are in poor condition and often occupied by people who are most vulnerable – elderly, economically inactive, socially isolated and who are unable to bring their homes up to a decent standard and maintain that standard. Overall 1 in 4 householders felt their house was inadequate for their needs; older people were more likely to feel it is too large and families with children were more likely to feel it is too small.

In areas of Kirklees where high deprivation levels exist there are corresponding high levels of non-decent, poor quality housing, especially in the private rented and owner occupied sector within central Huddersfield and south Dewsbury.

Young adults are at particular risk of homelessness as levels of unemployment amongst young people increase along with limited suitable affordable accommodation and difficulties in accessing credit.

Why is this issue important?

Decent housing is a pre-requisite for good health. To be classed as decent, a house must have reasonably modern facilities, be warm and weatherproof. People who live in clean, warm, safe and affordable homes are less likely to experience ill health as a consequence of their housing. Creating a physical environment in which people can live healthier lives with a greater sense of wellbeing is hugely important in reducing health inequalities. Living close to areas of green space including parks, woodland and other open spaces can improve health, regardless of social class. Rates of diseases such as diabetes, cancer, migraine/severe headaches and depression are lower in living environments with more green space within a one kilometre radius and mental health may be particularly affected by the amount of local green space^{1(p78)}.

The more deprived the neighbourhood, the more likely it is to have social and environmental characteristics presenting risks to health^{1(p78)}. These include poor housing, higher rates of crime, poorer air quality, a lack of green spaces and places for children to play and more risks to safety from traffic^{1(p78)}.

Bad housing conditions include homelessness, temporary accommodation, overcrowding, insecurity, and housing in poor physical condition that constitutes a risk to health. Children in bad housing conditions are more likely to have mental health problems, to contract meningitis, have respiratory problems, experience long term ill health and disability, experience slow physical growth and have delayed cognitive development^{1(p79)}.

What significant factors are affecting this issue?

1 in 6 (16%) of all homes in private ownership and private rent are in poor condition².

Housing needs change for people as their circumstances change, especially as people become more vulnerable, such as those with conditions causing physical disability, mental health problems and learning disabilities. Support to know how to accept their housing situation is crucial in them maintaining their independence.

Fuel poverty, where a household cannot afford to keep warm, damages people's health and affects their quality of life. The old, children and those who are disabled or have a long term illness are especially vulnerable. Extreme cold is believed to be the main explanation for the extra winter deaths occurring each year between December and March. A fuel poor household is one, which needs to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel to maintain an adequate heating regime. (see climate change section)

People's perceptions of their local neighbourhood, including the physical environment and cleanliness of the area, affect their overall sense of health and wellbeing.

Affordable housing

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment² highlights the local key issues for affordable housing:

- Population growth of 12.5%, over 50,000 people, by 2029 and 34,000 of this growth will be those aged over 65 years.
- By 2029, 1 in 5 adults will be aged over 65 years, an estimated 45% increase and the largest growth will be among people aged over 85 years.
- There are currently more than 170,000 households and these are expected to increase at a much faster rate than the population, with an additional 32,400 households by 2026.
- The greatest increase (45%) will be single person households, especially in the 45-54 and over 75 years age bands.
- Black and minority ethnic households could account for between 56% and 67% of household growth to 2021.

The assessment identified a net need for 1,540 additional affordable homes each year, more than the present total annual number of homes built. It also identified a particularly high demand for three bedroom properties and a consequent need for additional larger properties².

Best use of existing stock

Kirklees has a high number of homes (approx 1,370, 0.9% of the local housing stock) that have been empty for over six months. Most are within the private sector. Given the acute shortage of affordable housing of 1,540 homes annually, clearly empty homes must come back into use. Most empty homes in the private rented sector are old and poorly maintained. In the public sector, there is an issue with “hard to let” properties, notably older sheltered bedsits and one bedroom flats.

Overall, 1 in 4 (26%) households believed their home were inadequate for their needs. 1 in 10 (9%) of households believed their home is too big; of this group, 1 in 3 (38%) were pensioner households². Of those believing their home is too small, 20% lived in Dewsbury and Mirfield, 18% in Huddersfield south and 15% in The Valleys. South Asian families were much more likely to say their home is too small, 1 in 3 (36%) compared with 1 in 4 overall.

In October 2010, there were 970 people on the housing needs register who had applied because of overcrowding, 325 were local authority tenants and 645 were living as lodgers in overcrowded households. This represents 7.5% of housing applicants. In the first six months of 2010, 48 local authority tenants received assistance to help them downsize their homes.

Prevention and support

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment highlights a range of issues:

- Homelessness, although reducing in Kirklees, still affects more than 1,000 households every year. The recession has put more people at risk of losing their home and has made it less likely that people are in a position to make alternative, permanent, satisfactory housing arrangements.
- There has been an increase of 19% in mortgage claims issued in local courts in 2008, the highest in the region.
- Young people in Kirklees are particularly affected by lack of suitable, secure housing. This includes a lack of hostel accommodation.
- People aged under 25 years account for almost 30% of housing register applications and as such are the largest single group.

In some areas, it is difficult for people to get access to early advice, information and services with regard to their housing situation. The worst areas for barriers to housing and access to services are in rural south Kirklees, mostly Holmfirth. Most housing and advice services operate in the two main centres of Huddersfield and Dewsbury; services tend to operate in a disjointed manner rather than taking a holistic person centred approach².

Homes and neighbourhoods that support

References

1. Marmot, M. Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post 2010. 2010.
<http://www.marmot-review.org.uk/>

people

Social housing tenants are twice as likely to be unemployed as those in other tenures, rising to three times for new tenants. Rates are also higher among people from minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities. Unsurprisingly, homeless people have the highest rates of worklessness and the rate has increased significantly in recent years. This is exacerbated by a lack of skills and qualifications among this group together with other vulnerabilities that impede access to and retention of both housing and work.

In line with national trends, Kirklees has a growing older population that will inevitably lead to increased demands for housing services such as adaptations and housing related support. As set out elsewhere in the JSNA an increase in older people means more illnesses and disabilities associated with old age. The number of people claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in Kirklees increased by 16% in the five years to 2007². Given our ageing population and the increasing number of adults and children with significant levels of disability who rightly expect to be able to live in their own homes within the community, new developments have often not been adequately designed for diverse communities, including those who have restricted mobility or are affected by other disabilities and vulnerabilities².

Views of local people

Residents want homes that meet their housing need in successful communities that are socially inclusive.

What could commissioners and service planners consider?

- The need to ensure that people live in homes that are clean, warm, decent and affordable and that people have a sense of pride and security in their neighbourhood. This is a particular challenge in the private owner and private rented sector, and this might require more creative solutions as those that have worked in the social housing sector cannot necessarily be replicated in this sector.
- Reduce the number of vacant properties and increase the availability of appropriately sized homes, both larger and smaller, where they are needed.
- How to provide support to enable people to live as independently as possible, maintain their homes and tenancies successfully and feel able to maximise their economic and community participation.
- How to shift the focus of housing related support towards early recognition of issues, prevention and intervention in order to reduce the need for intensive, more costly longer term services such as hospital admission or residential or nursing care.
- Expand greenness in local space.

2. Kirklees Council. Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2009).

<http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/business/regeneration/ldf/pdf/strategicHousingMarketAssessment2009.pdf>