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**10** It is critical that we are able to measure the impact of the intervention and investment shaped by RHS to measure our progress, inform regional funding discussions, promote the region's case for the efficient and effective use of resources and to help local housing delivery plans focus on key strategic issues. To do this Chapter 7 establishes a new **Impact Assessment Framework** through a set of high level Strategic Housing Indicators that will be collated and monitored annually by the Regional Housing Board. These have been selected by reference to revised regional housing objectives and informed by the housing indicators being adopted by local authorities within their emerging LAAs and MAAs.

**11** To meet and deliver the challenges the RHS presents, it is recognised that we will need to build on the wealth of skills, expertise and good practice already existing in the region. This requires the resourcing and strengthening of greater capacity and practical cross boundary working relationships. Some mechanisms are already in place, for example, through Housing NW we are already starting to raise the quality of support available to housing practitioners in the region. Chapter 8 shows how this work needs to accelerate and be aligned with opportunities arising from the development of the Homes and Communities Agency.

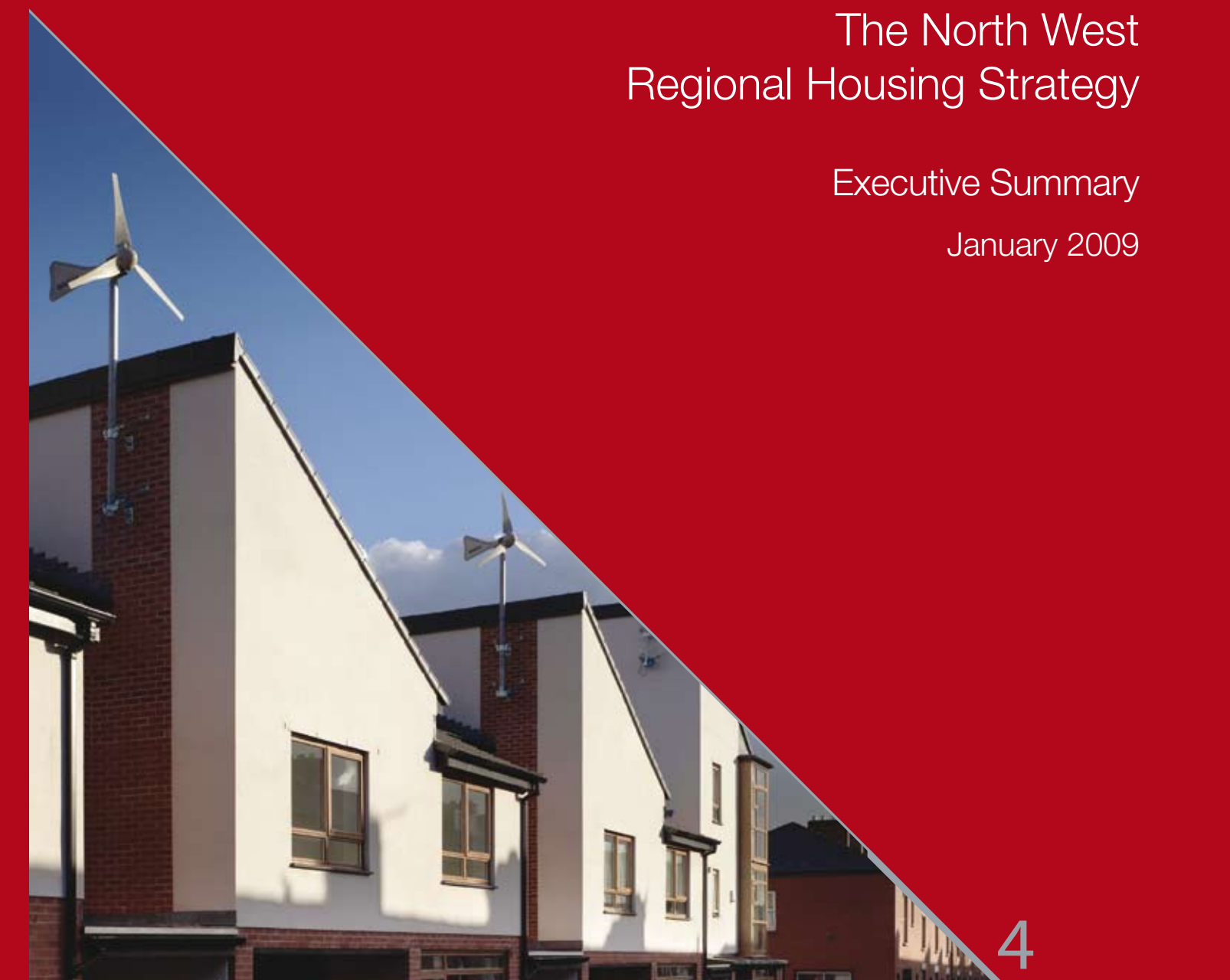
A full copy of the revised Regional Housing Strategy is available at:

[www.nwrpb.org.uk/regionalhousingstrategy09](http://www.nwrpb.org.uk/regionalhousingstrategy09)

# The North West Regional Housing Strategy

Executive Summary

January 2009



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Regional Leaders Forum

# Executive Summary

**1** This Regional Housing Strategy for the North West has been produced against a backdrop of significant structural change that has called for new approaches to advance and develop the 2005 Strategy. The following are the key issues that have arisen throughout the consultation period that the revised Strategy needs to address:

- The impact of the credit crunch on housing markets that were already extraordinarily dynamic;
- A changing demography;
- Identifying routes to establish or strengthen links between housing and economic agendas;
- Ways of improving access to affordable homes whilst continuing to restructure vulnerable markets;
- Spatially prioritising market intervention to ensure that limited public resources are used in the most effective way;
- Ensuring greater spatial prioritisation of market intervention; and
- Optimising the role of housing in tackling climate change and addressing fuel poverty.

**2** At the same time the North West has been developing responses to a series of major legislative and national policy changes including the Sub-national Economic Review, the Local Government White Paper, the Housing and Regeneration Act and the Housing Green Paper. These are helping shape a new broader framework for housing in the North West through, for example, the emergence of

the Regional Strategy and have created opportunities to strengthen delivery through the establishment of the Homes and Communities Agency.

**3** During the development and consultation for this Strategy, the scale and impact of the credit crunch, and subsequent UK recession, on the Region's housing markets became apparent. The tightening of credit has created uncertainty in our markets by restricting people's ability and confidence to access homeownership. Consumer confidence has been further undermined by falling house prices and uncertainties surrounding rising unemployment. In turn, falling demand has, through the price mechanism, affected the delivery of new homes. Yet at the same time the underlying growing demand for housing has not abated, the need to address poor quality housing has not lessened and the importance of housing's role in tackling exclusion is, if anything heightened. These issues call for a long term strategic vision and clarity of direction of travel that allow flexible short and medium term policy responses to be developed that will ensure we still deliver the Region's housing ambitions.

**4** These factors have led to the development of a new and quite different direction for this Strategy. The primary role of the previous RHS had been to steer the regional allocation of public investment in housing; this is no longer the case. At a regional level, this Strategy looks to align housing with our other key strategies on the economy, planning,

health, environment and transport. This will pave the way for an integrated role in the emerging Regional Strategy and help ensure the totality of public resources is most effectively used to attract and complement private investment. At a sub-regional and local level, this Strategy provides direction and a framework to ensure consistency of purpose and clarity of expected roles.

**5** The overarching driver behind the Strategy is to ensure the Region's housing offer supports sustained long term economic growth, inclusion and regeneration, while playing a central role in delivering the benefits of this to all communities. By strengthening and focussing interventions to ensure that housing markets operate effectively we will be able to address the tension that can exist between creating a long term housing offer that looks to people's aspirations and reacting to short term pressures to meet immediate housing needs.

**6** In striving to meet this ambition, the overall vision of the Regional Housing Strategy is: *"to create balanced housing markets across the North West that support economic growth, strengthen economic and social inclusion and ensure that everyone has access to appropriate, well-designed high quality, affordable housing in sustainable, mixed and vibrant communities."*

**7** To achieve this there are three equally important and connected objectives for the Strategy:

## Achieving the right quantity of housing

The Regional Spatial Strategy and local authority Local Development Frameworks identify the responses needed by 2021 to meet the numeric shortfall created by household growth outstripping housing supply. Through sub-regional and district housing strategies, the RHS complements this work by requiring new supply to fully complement the neighbourhood in which it sits. This means making it appropriate to local markets and environments and to be sustainable by getting the location, type, design, size and tenure right. The RHS also emphasises the importance of optimising the use of the existing stock and, in particular, of bringing empty properties into use.

## Continuing to raise the quality of the existing housing stock

Over 90% of the region's housing supply for 2021 is already built – this must continue to be or made to be fit for purpose and of a standard that current and future generations now demand. The RHS emphasises the critical importance of progressing work to ensure that our existing homes are of a high standard and made sustainable to play a full role in raising the quality of place of our neighbourhoods. The RHS also recognises the major role housing plays in creating a sense of place for communities and its contribution towards the North West's identity, character and heritage.

## Connecting people to the improved housing offer

The economic success of recent years and the improved quality of housing have led to important increases in the quality of life for many residents across the North West. Ensuring these benefits extend to all requires structured intervention that can be tailored to local circumstances. The RHS looks to ensure policy develops opportunities to access good housing and housing support choices to meet people's housing demands, needs and aspirations through a wide range of effective tools and products.

**8** The Strategy provides a framework for the 5 sub-regions to shape their housing strategies and work with their districts in establishing market interventions that will create balance across their housing markets. Using intelligence gathered from Strategic Housing Market Assessments these interventions will address the core three objectives through locally determined solutions and tie housing into a wider policy environment.

**9** One of the outcomes of the Sub-national Economic Review was to bring about significant changes in the roles of the agencies with responsibility for overseeing housing strategy and delivering against this. Chapter 6 provides details of the new roles and responsibilities of all of the key national, regional, sub-regional and local bodies in achieving the North West's housing ambitions.

A central role of this Strategy is to clarify the expected roles of the different agencies in the way they collaborate spatially in the delivery of desired outcomes. The RHB has a key role to play here in establishing frameworks to oversee working with regional partners and local authorities to ensure that these arrangements are effective and performance management systems are in place to deliver against ambitions.

### The core responsibilities are outlined below:

- 4NW and the RHB will oversee delivery of the Strategy and ensure democratic accountability;
- The NWDA with 4NW will jointly lead on developing the Regional Strategy, embracing social, environmental and economic issues;
- HCA will work with sub-regions, local authorities and their partners to support and enhance delivery;
- The North West Housing Forum will provide expertise in developing strategic issues and in the practical delivery of strategic priorities;
- Sub-regional housing partnerships will develop strategies informed by SHMAs that will interpret how the regional objectives are to be delivered across their areas; and
- Local authorities and their partners will deliver housing and regeneration activities prioritised in their Community Strategies, LDFs and Local Area Agreements that meet local needs, demands and aspirations.

This work needs to be done as a package and it will therefore be important to get the sequencing and relationships right.