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LEEDS: THE UK'S FIRST HOUSING CITY

Leeds City Council is to announce a raft of new measures to boost housing in Leeds at the launch of a campaign that will see it become the first city in the UK to declare housing its top priority.

In the increasingly dire economic times, the city is to take a stand for those whose homes are at risk, those who cannot afford their own place to live or those who live in poor housing.

In a keynote speech to launch the **Leeds: The Housing City** campaign, council leader Cllr Andrew Carter is to declare that providing affordable, good quality housing is the number one priority for Leeds.

Backed by other members of the administration, Cllr Carter will announce the first in a series of bold new measures designed to encourage developers to continue building homes, pumping millions into existing schemes and providing new ways to tackle council housing waiting lists.

They include:

- **A £3.78million kick-start for the building of affordable homes** through the Strategic Affordable Housing Partnership, which will see homes built on 87 acres of public 'brown field' land – with work on 86 properties starting this year
- **Encouraging developers to build affordable housing** by waiving the Section 106 planning contribution for housing developments that are 100% affordable
- **Spending £2.4million to buy 27 properties**, 10 of which will become council houses and the others becoming affordable rented properties

Corporate Communications, Civic Hall, Leeds LS1 1UR
Phone: 0113 247 4328 Fax: 0113 247 4736

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Switchboard: 0113 234 8080

- **Protecting major projects such as the East and South East Leeds (EASEL) initiative** so it can brave difficult economic times.

This very public commitment to housing in the city demonstrates that Leeds is leading the way in providing more affordable housing and helping people into homes. The campaign will raise awareness of the good work that is now going on in the face of economic crisis – the very time that people need help.

The new policies follow other innovative moves brought in since the end of last year, as the housing crisis began, including:

- **Raising the amount of affordable housing a developer must provide** from 15%-20% to 30%, which will be introduced as part of supplementary planning guidance but in the current climate is being dealt with on case-by-case basis
- **Reducing the under-occupation of the largest council homes** by giving tenants £1,000 for every bedroom that they release in a downsize
- **Commissioning Re’new to develop a strategy for the city’s 19,500 back-to-back houses**, with the council leading on development of a city-wide strategy to encompass back-to-back and other old, poor quality housing
- **Becoming the most successful authority in the country at returning empty property to use**
- **The levying of 100% Council Tax charge on empty properties**
- **Helping people who are at risk of losing their homes** with a mortgage relief scheme through the Golden Triangle Partnership, working towards a city-wide approach with potential support from central government
- **Developing a city-wide approach to improve access to and provision of housing advice, and increase the options available to all the people of Leeds.**

Cllr Andrew Carter, leader of Leeds City Council and executive board member for development, said:

“This a very public declaration that housing is a top priority for Leeds in these harsh economic times.

“Things are hard for the family who can’t afford the mortgage, for the single parent who can’t afford their rent, for the youngsters who can’t afford their first home and the people who just want a decent home.

“But rather than sit back and wait for others to help, we are doing something about housing now through radical and innovative projects, setting the national agenda on providing more and better housing.

“And working with its partners, Leeds is able to achieve much more than it could on its own.”

Cllr Richard Brett, deputy leader of Leeds City Council, said:

“While doomsayers hide behind ‘the credit crunch’ as an excuse not to act, Leeds is doing all it can to help people who need to be housed.

“There’s much work to do, but with these policies we are supporting beleaguered developers by encouraging them to keep building, supporting housing projects that offer homes to ordinary people and providing innovative solutions to getting people off the housing waiting lists and into homes.”

Cllr Les Carter, Leeds City Council executive board member for housing, said:

“No other city in the country has had the foresight and dedication to deal with this issue.

“All too often our hands have been tied when we have tried to do something to help people into homes, so we have had to be clever and schemes such as EASEL and the Strategic Affordable Housing Partnership are exactly that – pioneering ways of providing more and better housing.

“This commitment to housing is timely but vital – Leeds is and will be the UK’s top city for housing.”

**For media enquiries please contact:
Michael Molcher, Leeds City Council Press Office (0113) 224 3937
e-mail michael.molcher@leeds.gov.uk
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