

Housing Strategy Performance

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The current Housing Strategy and action plan 2006 -11 was approved by members in May 2006 and takes account of the 2003-2006 Regional Housing Strategy and the London Commuter Belt strategy. Since the inception of the current Housing Strategy there have been considerable changes in government and regional office priorities, and the establishment of the Homes Communities Agency. This together with the achievement of many of the priorities set out in the current Housing Strategy means it is now necessary to produce a new fit for purpose Housing Strategy that reflects the Council's current priorities and the new/emerging regional structures.
- 1.2 The Housing Strategy 2006-11 contains 11 objectives/priorities for achievement. These are set out below together with commentary on what progress has been made towards achievement.
- 1.3 **Objective 1. Improve the quality of council owned housing stock.**
In March 2008 the council successfully transferred its housing stock of 3,800 homes, following a ballot of the tenants to Thrive Homes (a Registered Social Landlord) created to take on the ownership and management of the Council's housing stock.
- Thrive Homes and the Council have a contractual commitment through the Offer Document to former Council tenants to bring their homes to the Government's Decent Home standards. Thrive Homes have a £43m improvement programme to be achieved over five years. A number of households have already benefited from improvements to the internal and external aspects of all their properties with new bathrooms, kitchen and works to the external structures. Thrive Homes expect to conduct a Decent Homes assessment in 2010.
- 1.4 **Objective 2. Improve the quality of private owned housing stock.**
The Council's Private Sector Housing Team report ongoing achievement of this target. They have successfully introduced the Housing Multi-Occupation licensing for certain properties, implemented Housing Health and Safety Rating System, exceeded the target of 6 empty homes back into use and have identified homes which may become subject to use of the Empty Homes Management order.
- 1.6 **Objective 3. Enable affordable Housing in the District.**
The Council continues to prioritise development of affordable housing in the district by working with Registered Social Landlords through the HARI (Housing and Regeneration Initiative) Partnership. The housing strategy set an annual target for the development of 75 new affordable homes. The table below sets out the number of new affordable homes developed since March 2006. In total 213 affordable homes were developed between April 2006 - March 2009. This is 12 homes short of the 225 target set for this period. In addition, the table below indicates the shortfall in the development of new affordable homes is likely to significantly increase to 61 against the target of 150 new affordable homes for the period April 2009 – March 2010. The shortfall is largely due to the slump in general housing development as a result of the

economic downturn. Earlier this year Officers presented details and recommendations to pump prime initiatives to affordable housing through partnership work with Registered Social Landlords.

	<i>Affordable dwelling completions</i>
2006/07	123
2007/08	13
2008/09	83
2009/10	12 (planned)
2010/11	77 (planned)

The Council is committed to sustainability in housing development and has set a target of 25% of all future homes being built to Eco-Homes standards. This standard has been recently replaced by a new standard – the Code for Sustainable Homes. All new social housing developments must reach Code Level 3 for Sustainable Homes. Since the inception of the current Housing Strategy, new social housing developed has reached either Eco-Home Standard or Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 or higher.

The East of England Regional Assembly produced a Countywide report on Gypsies and Travellers. This details suggested sites in TRDC. The Council proposes to consult on the site locations in the autumn of 2010. Following the consultation, Members will determine which sites it will allocate for Gypsies and Travellers within the District.

Sustainable rural communities are a key aspect of the Housing Strategy which set a target of development of 15 rural homes by 2011. This is unlikely to be achieved. A site owned by the Royal British Legion has been identified, for affordable housing. However negotiations have stalled on the land available for development and valuation. In addition the Council has found another site and it was difficult to identify a Registered Social Landlord to develop this site identified by Planning exclusively for social housing. The site has planning permission for a single family dwelling. This target is unlikely to be achieved if the prevailing market conditions continue, but it will remain a high priority.

1.6 Objective 4. Review the use of sheltered schemes and develop extra care facilities

Hertfordshire County Council produced a Countywide strategy for Older People in consultation with Council officers. The strategy identified there is an over-provision of sheltered accommodation in the district. In addition the strategy prioritised Three Rivers as an area to develop extra care. This coincides with the Council's own priority. The Council, HCC and a specialist Registered Social Landlord for older people are currently in discussion in relation to a HCC owned site in South Oxhey as a location for extra care housing.

1.7 Objective 5. Increase choice in housing.

The development and implementation of a joint bid for government funding for a Choice Based Lettings Scheme for the South West Herts area, lead by TRDC, was successful in 2007. The Council continues to be the lead authority for the Herts Choice Homes CBL consortium. CBL went live in TRDC and Hertsmere in December 2008. The three

remaining Local Authorities, Watford, St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield went live in May 2009. The Council is currently in the process of undertaking a review of the impact of its new allocation scheme and Choice Based Lettings.

Major consultation was undertaken prior to the introduction of the Council's new Housing Allocation Policy. The new policy moved from a points scheme to bands. In addition, the new policy incorporates a Common Allocation scheme in partnership with the other 4 local authorities and allows cross-borough mobility between the partner local authorities. The Housing Allocation policy is published on the Housing Website. The Choice Based Lettings Scheme actively promotes schemes such as Homebuy and Low Cost Homes ownership, together with other opportunities to move home such as Home Swapper, the largest mutual exchange service in the UK.

The Council continues to maximise the use of its successful Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme which helps local people in priority housing need access the private rented sector. TRDC led the first joint Landlords Forum with Dacorum and Watford in December 2007. Since the joint forum there has been an increase in the take up of private rent properties going through the scheme. This has been the case since during the economic downturn. The Rent Deposit Scheme has acquired 34 new tenancies since April 2009, which brings the total number of families in the scheme to 151 as of 3 September 2009.

1.8 **Objective 6. Improve the neighbourhoods /environment**

The target focused primarily on the Council's former role as landlord. The Housing Strategy sought to invest a proportion of the capital programme for environmental improvements. These include grass-crete parking bays at School Mead and more play areas in Ebury Road and Barton Way, with further improvements to the Aquadrome and the Café. TRDC has also encouraged the use of greener energy, by the use of ground source heating for example.

All new affordable housing developments are "Secure by Design". This means a Hertfordshire Police Secure by Design Officer views the plans and layout of new housing schemes and provides comments on designing out crime and increasing security features.

When the Council owned housing it introduced contract cleaning of communal flat blocks. A new cleaning contract was let in October 2007

1.9 **Objective 7. Working in partnership developing facilities to reduce Anti Social Behaviour.**

The Council has reviewed its Anti-Social Behaviour database to improve the recording, mapping, case tracking, statistical data and local satisfactions levels. The Council was one of the early signatories to the Government's Respect Agenda.

Working with partners to create diversionary activities for groups likely to commit ASB and disorder has been a priority, with the Council creating and successfully recruiting to a new post of Anti-Social Behaviour Officer. This post works in close partnership with Thrive Homes who have appointed an ASB Officer, West Herts. Against Crime, Multi

Agency Risk Assessment Conference, Offender Management Group Joint Action Group, and Youth Inclusion Support Panel and Chair the TRDC Domestic Violence Forum.

Thrive Homes have continued the measures introduced by the Council of demoted tenancies or use of ASBC's (Anti-Social Behaviour Contracts) or ASBOs (Anti Social Behaviour Orders) for tenants committing ASB.

The Council continues to work with Hertfordshire County Council Children, Schools and Families Department referring at risk households facing eviction as a result of ASB/Crime & Disorder. Joint Housing Protocol procedures are being reviewed to improve preventative services to households facing eviction.

1.10 **Objective 8. Improve the quality of the Council Services**

This involves physical improvements to be made to the reception and office space within the well used former South Oxhey Area Housing Office. This site is currently leased to Thrive Homes. Any improvement plans for this building are now shelved.

Housing performance with indicators to reach top quartile by 2008. Only one of our Best Value Performance Indicators was in the top quartile. There has been an introduction of new Housing performance indicators, which have not yet been published.

1.11 **Objective 9. Improving tenants' participation and communication**

In the Council's former role as landlord, it dramatically increased and improved tenant involvement and participation, including the employment of a Tenants' Participation Officer to increase the participation of council tenants and increase representation from the under-represented groups such as BME. Thrive Homes have built on these foundation with the development of a Resident Involvement Strategy.

1.12 **Objective 10. Reducing homelessness through improved support for vulnerable people,**

Recorded levels of statutory homelessness have significantly reduced as indicated in the table below. This is primarily as a result of the change of emphasis away from formal homelessness application to the provision of advice and housing options for all.

Year	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
Homeless Approaches to March 31st	211	249	190	103	126

Despite the initial and significant local opposition to the development of a supported housing scheme for young people in South Oxhey, the 12 units of supported accommodation were successfully completed in July 2008 and provide accommodation for young homeless people.

The Housing Team has virtually eliminated the use of Bed & Breakfast except for absolute emergencies. In the last 12 months only one family was placed in Bed and Breakfast. This has been achieved whilst ensuring emergency shelter for certain client groups e.g. those fleeing domestic violence. In addition the Housing Team continues to explore and develop benefits of shared resources with neighbouring authorities. Examples of this include discussion with Watford Council to take on the Council's Homelessness Out of Hours Services and the development of a new IT Homelessness/Housing Option Management System in partnership with Watford and Hertsmere Councils. The latter is due to be implemented late autumn 2009

Develop and amend the SOLO service, by looking at a support worker funded to procure rooms in houses with a resident landlord and offering a link to other support agencies for vulnerable age group. It considers placements to be made to the SOLO schemes for the 16/17 year old client group avoiding the use of B & B. There has been progress in the SOLO project taking 16-17 year olds and they are currently placing clients on a short-term basis in accommodation provided, with the added support that is needed by the organization that runs the SOLO project.

TRDC has helped to establish a housing assessment panel for 16-25 year olds with other authorities and agencies. The Joint Housing Protocol has developed to include 16-25 year olds and is proving successful.

1.13

Objective 11. Increase to support vulnerable people.

The Council in partnership with other agencies has successfully lobbied for increased resources for floating support. This is now incorporated into the HCC Supporting People Strategy. The County Council has significantly increased resources for floating support in the whole of the County. This includes developing a floating support for people with mental health circumstances. Supporting People started this floating support scheme in the summer of 2008, and there is a nil figure in the numbers currently using the mental health scheme.