

FOREWORD

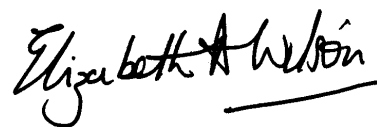
The Housing Strategy for Huntingdonshire is a corporate document prepared, owned and endorsed by a wide range of participants. This includes local authority departments, voluntary and statutory agencies, private sector bodies, local residents and service users. The document has been developed through active participation, continuous dialogue and debate with the following partners:

Residents
Age Concern
Property Letting Agents
The Housing Corporation
Registered Social Landlords
Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Cambridgeshire Health Authority
Cambridgeshire Probation Service
National House Builders Federation
Huntingdonshire Primary Care Trust
The Huntingdonshire Landlords' Forum
Hinchingbrooke NHS Health Care Trust
South Peterborough Primary Care Trust
Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations
Carers' National Association (Huntingdon)
The Huntingdonshire Letting Agents' Forum
DASH (Drug and Alcohol Service, Huntingdon)
Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership
Cambridgeshire County Council Social Services

Thanks are extended to all those who contributed towards this Housing Strategy.



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INTRODUCTION

The Council, in its capacity as the strategic and enabling housing authority, aims to provide direction for private and social housing activity within the District. The Housing Services Division is responsible for co-ordinating the consultation process and the production of the Housing Strategy. However, this would not have been achieved without the commitment of numerous colleagues and partner agencies continuously throughout the past year and during the Strategy review process itself.

The Housing Strategy statement 2004-07 is a working document based on a three year plan of action required to address identified needs in the District. It is a revision of the previous year's statement and it highlights key changes and developments since last year that will affect the achievement of our strategic objectives.

The key and other future priorities listed at the end of each chapter of this strategy have been developed in consultation with stakeholders and residents and in consideration of national and regional priorities. Priorities are set out in a separate Action Plan together with targets dates and financial information. All of the priorities have the necessary resources, either provided directly by the Council or by working in partnership with external agencies, to ensure they are achieved. Each of the priorities feed into individual service plans and these are monitored on a fortnightly basis by the individual responsible for the service plan, and on a quarterly basis as part of the Council's corporate performance management system.

Progress Report

Since the previous Strategy, Huntingdonshire has moved forward in a number of areas. The Council has:

- completed a total of 84 affordable housing units with our RSL partners in the year ending March 2003
- implemented a Housing Renewal Assistance Policy
- produced a Private Sector Housing Strategy
- completed a District-wide Housing Needs Survey
- assisted in the production of the Cambridge sub-region housing strategy with neighbouring Local Authorities and housing providers
- increased the number of Disabled Facilities Grants awarded
- implemented the County wide OPEN OUT scheme for victims of hate crime.
- commenced a multi-agency mixed funded Very Sheltered Housing scheme in St Neots which will include intermediate care provision to enable early releases from hospital
- introduced specific planning briefs for designated housing development areas
- implemented a mandatory registration scheme for HMO properties in Huntingdonshire
- produced a BME housing Strategy
- produced a homelessness strategy.

CHAPTER 1 DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

Our Aim is to:

- **involve stakeholders in the development of Huntingdonshire's strategy for housing.**

Our Key Objectives are to:

- **have regard for both urban and rural issues in the development of our strategy for housing**
- **maintain the integrity of our Housing Strategy based upon current and appropriate research of local housing issues**
- **produce action plans to deliver the strategic aims and objectives, and to provide fora for feedback, monitoring and development of our Housing Strategy.**

Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership and the Community Strategy

The Council is working with the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership – the local strategic partnership – to bring together different parts of the public sector with the business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together. The principle way in which this will be achieved will be through a Community Strategy, a long-term shared vision for Huntingdonshire, supported by shorter-term action plans. The Community Strategy will be published in September 2003.

The Community Strategy will set a direction for service providers so that they can contribute to improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of Huntingdonshire – in short to improve the quality of life for local people

Housing is a key component in the quality of life and in this context the housing strategy will both influence and reflect the priorities and activities within the Community Strategy and the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership. A specific outcome of the strategy will be to ensure that we have an adequate supply of high quality housing to meet local needs. This reflects the close link between the Community Strategy and the Local Plan for Huntingdonshire.

This approach recognises the vital role housing has in the lives of our residents and that it has to be considered alongside other issues which influence the well being of our communities. Unsuitable housing or unaffordable housing compound the problems of disadvantaged individuals and groups and affect the quality of life of local people. The development of the strategic partnership and a community strategy has enabled us to develop the links between housing and related issues in the areas of health, social care, community safety, social inclusion, renewal and regeneration, transport, sustainability, education & training and employment.

When the community strategy is published the Councils own plans will be examined and aligned to ensure that individually or by working with others we fulfill our part of the strategy and the partnership. This in turn will build on already well-developed partnership working with the health, social services and the voluntary sectors to deliver of the strategy and shared vision.

Regional Strategic Framework

The East of England is unique among the English Regions. Three of the four growth areas identified by the Deputy Prime Minister lie largely or partly within the East of England.

- London - Stansted - Cambridge corridor
- Milton Keynes - South Midlands
- Thames Gateway

The Region's affordable housing study reveals that there is a future demand for 26,600 additional homes a year to provide for newly emerging needs, including 7,160 affordable homes every year. Yet this does not take any account of the region's existing housing need. Each year 29,665 households are estimated as being in housing need in the East of England. The 2001 Census shows a major increase in population growth in the region of 11% over the last 20 years, compared to 5% nationally.

There can be no doubt the region is ready for the "step change" in housing provision promised by *Sustainable communities: building for the future*. The East of England Housing Strategy 2003-2006 is the document that details actions to deliver more sustainable communities in the region. It will be an effective tool for the Regional Housing Board for the East of England as it assumes its strategic role in delivering regional solutions to regional problems.

The eight authorities that form the Cambridge sub-region produced the Cambridge sub-region Housing Strategy 2003-2006. The document has a robust assessment of the housing issues and pressures as well as an assessment of the levels of investment required in the sub-region. The executive summary of this strategy was used to inform the development of the East of England Housing Strategy 2003-2006.

This Housing Strategy reflects the regional priorities contained within the East of England Housing Strategy 2003-2006 which are influenced by the action plan set out in *Sustainable communities: building for the future*. The Regional priorities are to focus on the immediate actions that will deliver more homes, more quickly and focuses on people, places, products and programmes.

Links with Government Policy Initiatives and Local Strategies

The Council welcomes the programme of action in *Sustainable communities: building for the future*. Many of the actions are either already embodied in our Housing Strategy or are proposed in the near future.

All social housing in the district is on target to meet the Decent Homes standard by 2010. The recently introduced Housing Renewal Assistance Policy has enhanced the services available for vulnerable occupants of private housing.

Abandoned properties and 'low demand' or undesirable areas are not an issue in the District and the principles established in the Council's Empty Homes Strategy address the issue of Empty property in the district.

We are working with housing providers on both a district and sub regional basis to address the housing supply issue and are working towards a "step change" in housing provision. This work includes addressing the need for more affordable housing both for key workers and households who are homeless, creating conditions in which private house builders will build

more homes of the right type in the right places. We are working with RSLs with the aim of making best use of the existing social housing stock.

Involvement in the Health Improvement Programme (HImP) is a major part of the Council's housing role and has been for some time. Partnership working with statutory and voluntary agencies is an integral part of the development of new housing initiatives.

The inextricable links between the Housing Strategy and other local strategies, including the Local Plan, Community Plan (which includes Local Agenda 21 considerations), Community Safety Strategy, Cambridgeshire Local Transport Strategy, Health for Huntingdonshire Partnership and Social Services' Children's Plan, are recognised and referred to later in this document.

The Consultation Process

The process of consultation with local residents and partners is a continuous one, not just an annual exercise for the purpose of revising the Housing Strategy statement. Regular formalised meetings at both strategic and operational level throughout the year in numerous multi-agency strategic groups with HImP partners ensure that where areas of interest overlap, agencies are working to common goals which have been jointly agreed. Frequent discussions with the Housing Corporation and developing RSLs take place and quarterly development and housing management meetings are held. Participation in the various Cambridgeshire sub-region groups, the Cambridgeshire Chief Housing Officers' Group, the County-wide Supporting People Group, the County Strategic Housing Group and the Planning and Affordable Housing Groups ensure there is co-ordination of Cambridgeshire-wide issues.

In addition, more formal consultation on the Housing Strategy is held with the partners listed at the beginning of this document.

The Council has strengthened the extent to which tenants, residents and private sector landlords inform the Housing Strategy by developing mechanisms for regular discussion and consultation with these groups. This includes landlord fora, RSL Tenants' Panel Meeting and district wide distribution of the Housing Strategy, including Libraries, CABx, District Council Office receptions and leisure centres. The Housing Strategy is also available on the Council's website. Membership of many of the Groups and Partnerships mentioned in this Strategy consist of service users and their input is a vital part of the consultation and partnership working process. The use of the various consultation processes ensures that priorities for development and investment, which we already set in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies, are also fully informed by local residents and private sector representatives.

Delivering the Strategy

Following the annual production of the Housing Strategy, an Action Plan is drawn up to focus attention on the delivery of our stated Future Priorities. Progress against set targets and budgets is monitored as a normal part of individual management processes but pulled together in a single document on a quarterly basis. This creates multi-disciplinary ownership of the Housing Strategy and ensures that housing issues become an integral part of others' Service Plans.

Our Key Future Priorities are to:

- **continue to make the strategic links between housing, other corporate strategies and those of partner agencies**
- **continue to make the strategic links between regional and national housing strategies and policies**
- **continue to strengthen the involvement of residents in the strategy consultation process.**

CHAPTER 2 THE NEED FOR HOUSING

Our Aim is to:

- **identify and quantify local housing need in order to plan housing provision.**

Our Key Objectives are to:

- **have regard to Community Care issues when planning housing provision for those with special needs**
- **operate and promote the Housing and Special Needs Housing Registers to assist in the identification of suitable accommodation**
- **use all relevant sources of information including the District-wide Housing Needs Survey to determine current and future housing need and to plan housing provision**
- **use local needs surveys undertaken by developers or RSLs to supplement our housing needs information, as and when specific sites come forward**
- **use the private sector Stock Condition Survey to identify the need for repairs and to target resources for housing in the District.**

Our Information Sources

Without doubt, a Housing Strategy must be based on the clear identification of needs and forecasts of possible future trends. A range of information based on research has improved the Council's knowledge of the current private sector and social rented stock in Huntingdonshire. This forms the basis of the Housing Strategy, enabling plans for the future direction of resources and priorities for action to be reached.

The 2002 District-wide Housing Needs Survey provides invaluable information to supplement that which is acquired from the Housing Register, Special Needs Housing Register and 2001 Census data. The 100% external Stock Condition Survey, which commenced in 1998 and covers all tenures, is now 90% complete.

The Council's survey of RSLs indicates that all social housing in the district will meet the Decent Homes standards by 2010. Work with health and Social Services partners through the HImP process, and Supporting People as well as Joint Investment Plans, has highlighted health and social care needs and the gaps and discrepancies in the level of provision. The Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) provides some indication of future growth and the need for additional housing of all tenures within the District.

In any local economy a significant proportion of households, usually around 30%, will be unable to afford to become or remain home owners and will need to be accommodated in social housing or the middle-to-lower priced end of the private rented sector. Our report *Reading The Housing Market July 2003* indicates that this group, priced out of owner-occupation, is growing and it will continue to grow because:

- the earnings of younger middle-sector employees (aspiring first-time buyers) are not keeping pace with the rise in house prices;
- lower-end earnings would appear to be static; and
- new entry level housing is not being built in sufficient quantity.

Middle income households priced out of the sale market will need to be accommodated in the private rented sector. *Reading the Housing Market* shows demand for this tenure to be rising but while, according to some letting agents, supply may also have risen marginally in the past year, the long-term trend is unmistakably downward. A key finding is that in the order of 1000 privately rented units (or 15% of the local stock) have disappeared since 1991. There is good evidence that most of this loss has taken place in the past six years.

Our Housing Requirements

Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) for East Anglia sets the framework for development plans in the region until 2016, and County and Local Plans are required to have regard to this guidance. In terms of housing growth, an average of 4,000 new homes per year are needed in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, of which 70% should be in the Cambridgeshire sub-region (which, in Huntingdonshire, extends as far as the market towns of St Neots, St Ives, Huntingdon and Godmanchester). New developments are expected to be in sustainable locations, maximising the use of previously developed land, minimising commuting and the need to travel, and taking account of the proximity of local services, schools and employment opportunities. These aims are mirrored by the requirements expressed by applicants on the Council's Housing Register.

The RPG emphasises the need for housing to be located where there is good access to Cambridge, because of its booming economy and attendant housing requirements. At the same time the development of clusters of knowledge-based industries elsewhere, such as at Huntingdon, is also promoted. These general principles are now reflected in a Structure Plan review for Cambridgeshire, which was subject to an Examination in Public at the end of 2002, and is scheduled to be adopted in late 2003. The new Structure Plan identifies a requirement for 9,500 additional dwellings in Huntingdonshire between 1999 and 2016. Provision for many of these dwellings already exists through existing planning permissions and allocations. An alteration to the adopted Local Plan was adopted in December 2002, and this contains a number of new housing allocations for the period up to 2006. Work has also begun on reviewing the Local Plan to address those additional housing requirements that will need to be met by 2016.

Meeting the need for affordable properties is a key issue that the new Structure Plan, the Local Plan Alteration and the review of the Local Plan are all concerned with. In support of this an up-to-date Housing Needs Survey for Huntingdonshire was completed in April 2003. We are also undertaking a sub regional housing needs survey and a separate sub-regional keyworker study working with the seven councils in the Cambridge sub-region. The results of both surveys will be available in late Summer 2003.

The Condition of Our Stock

Although it is an area of ancient settlement, Huntingdonshire has expanded significantly in population size in the post-war period and particularly the 1960's, which saw considerable immigration from London. Please see *Reading The Housing Market* - July 2003 page 4, which has more detailed information on population growth. As a consequence, over half of the District's stock was built in a 15-year period from the mid 1960s to 1980, whilst only approximately 10% pre-dates 1900.

Priorities for housing action are determined by information from residents, from advice and referral agencies and from data derived from our 100% external Stock Condition Survey. Over 90% of the stock has now been surveyed, the inspection of the remaining rural villages is now being finalised.

Analysis of the results from the Stock Condition Survey so far has shown that:

- there are no major concentrations of unfit stock but there are individual dwellings mainly within market towns, in the unfit and major disrepair categories which will require further inspection
- 252 properties have been assessed as unfit. When extrapolated, it is anticipated that the overall total for the District will be 274
- most of the unfit properties were built before 1900 and are located in the market towns
- 3599 properties have been found to be in need of major repair. When extrapolated, it is anticipated that the overall total for the District will be over 3900.

This information provides valuable data for the targeting of staff and financial resources at areas of greatest need. Whilst the number of unfit properties is not large, it is recognised there is a need to address major repair requirements before these properties become unfit. The large proportion of the total stock built between 1965 and 1981 will require action in future as various building elements start reaching the end of their life cycle.

To assess the energy efficiency of the housing stock, information has been gathered from the Stock Condition Survey, individual property surveys, data acquired from individual enquirers, and various partners. Energy efficiency grants are being actively promoted, in particular the Warm Front scheme, which is seen as the main vehicle by the Government for improving thermal comfort, and Energy Efficiency Commitment grants from the power companies. Energy efficiency advice is aimed at many different groups within the community, with particular emphasis on those people who are potentially fuel poor.

The transfer of the Council's housing stock to the Huntingdonshire Housing Partnership (HHP) is enabling substantial modernisation, improved energy efficiency, affordable warmth and greater standards of comfort arising from window replacement to these properties. Inevitably health benefits will also be derived from such improvements, and a substantial programme is currently underway that will benefit the majority of HHP homes. The Council is working with HHP by providing Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) profiles of the stock to allow targeting of those properties most in need of energy efficiency improvements.

Other RSL stock within Huntingdonshire, being largely recently developed, is projected to be in reasonable condition. However, work is underway with all RSLs in the District to promote energy efficiency and to help them to provide energy efficiency advice to their tenants. The updating or remodeling of sheltered housing schemes and the improvement of sub-standard properties are issues of prime concern for RSLs and for the Council in its strategic role.

The Council is also mindful of the Government's target to have all social housing meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010, with a one-third reduction in the number of non-decent homes by 2004. Our recent survey of RSLs who have stock in the District has confirmed that their housing will meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

The Shortage of Suitable Housing

The results of the District-wide Housing Needs Survey were produced in April 2003. The Survey was based on 500 completed personal interviews and 1252 returned postal forms on a random sample of households in all tenures within 9 sub areas of the district. The main results of the survey were:

- 2,779 (4.3%) of all households are currently living in unsuitable housing
- 1,528 households with a newly arising housing need each year

- 5,065 extra affordable homes are required to meet need to 2011
- 9.8% of households, 6,377, have one or more special needs
- justification for a target of 40% affordable housing on all eligible sites
- 928 new households will form each year
- 240 households will need to move into the district each year
- there is a shortage of 1 and 2 bedroom homes.

The Housing and Special Needs Registers are important sources of information about individuals' actual housing needs. As at 1 April 2003 there were 2868 applicants on the Housing Register, of which 265 are seeking special needs housing. Demand for specific property types and locations is used to match existing vacancies and to plan future housing. Applicants' income and savings details have been used to survey interest in shared ownership schemes and to subsequently prioritise nominations to such developments. Records kept of priority and non-priority homelessness cases reveal a need for more housing for single people, but the incidence of rough sleepers in Huntingdonshire recorded by partner agencies such as Cambridgeshire Police is negligible. Discussion with Social Services and health colleagues indicate a very limited incidence of teenage pregnancies in the District.

Affordability

The affordability of local market sector housing in the District continues to be a cause of concern to the Council. Huntingdonshire continues to experience a high rate of house price inflation due to:

- The buoyancy of the local economy driven by retail, business services and high technology industries located in Huntingdonshire and the Cambridgeshire sub-region.
- A general scarcity of housing. This is confirmed by the Halifax House Price Index which reported: "In the Huntingdon area the main issue is the lack of properties available, which is forcing prices up and making it more difficult for first-time buyers to get into the market".
- The importation of house price inflation as medium-to-high earners migrate northward from Cambridge and London to take advantage of the house price differential which still exists. As the Halifax states: "development ...around Cambridge...is having a ripple effect on locations such as St. Ives and Huntingdon..." The "London Effect" for a District enjoying sub one-hour rail links to the capital has also been summarised by Cambridge Econometrics which reported: "The two-hour return commuter rail travel zone is a major threshold for London workers, with higher prices and more volatility in the values of houses as they are selected progressively closer to London".
- A marked tendency for developers to build for the upper and middle end of the market causing intensified bidding for lower-end properties.

The average price of a Huntingdonshire home is now around £143,000, up from £120,000 last year.

In the private rented sector, which accounts for around 10% of local stock, demand for accommodation of most types and in most locations continues to be high relative to supply. Letting agents and landlords confirm that in the present market there are no business reasons why they should let to households unable to pay the rent fully from their own resources. There is some evidence that prospective private tenants needing to claim housing benefit to supplement their own resources still remain in the market, but that those

dependent on benefit to meet all or a large proportion of a market rent are all but shut out of this tenure. As we discovered in a recent survey, all the major local letting agencies admit that they will not consider households who will need to claim HB on equal terms with households not needing to claim. Of 20 agents known to us all but eight refuse outright to accept claimants.

Some measure of the housing affordability problem can be grasped from the following overview of average earnings and house prices in the District, which is considered in detail in the Council's market research supplement *Reading the Housing Market, July 2003* (pages 9-14). The average earnings figure for full-time employees in Huntingdonshire at April 2002 was £23,602 per annum. The top 10% of earners grossed over £38,006 per annum, while the bottom 10% earned under £11,871, which is the lowest bottom decile figure of any Cambridgeshire local authority district after Fenland. Fenland, however, has markedly lower house prices, with an average of all sales in the fourth quarter of 2002 of £103,310 compared with the Huntingdonshire average of £143,540. Crudely expressed, a first time buyer household in the unlikely position of having a non-housing credit commitment of £250 a month and needing a 100% mortgage would need a gross income of £47,000 a year in order to afford the average-priced Huntingdonshire house. In April 2002, 44.6% of all Huntingdonshire earners grossed under £18,200 and 63.2% of all local female employees earned less than this figure.

Rural Need

Huntingdonshire is essentially a rural District with five towns, four of which are market towns, and over 80 dispersed villages. RPG recognises the inextricable link between future development and the limitations of the current transport infrastructure. The Cambridgeshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) highlights that access by private motor car is important to more rural areas because conventional public transport is often not viable. Those without a car living in rural areas are clearly at a disadvantage. The LTP's "Action for Rural Areas" report acknowledges the role of the car, and whilst encouraging cycling, walking, community transport, buses and rail transport, it recognises that changes will not happen overnight.

Black and Ethnic Minority Needs

The 2001 Census states that 97.2% of Huntingdonshire residents are classified as "white" and born in the United Kingdom. Of the remaining 2.8%, the Census showed no concentration of residents within any one ethnic group. This makes the identification of specific housing and other needs more difficult to ascertain. The council recognises that further work needs to be undertaken to determine whether the council provides the services residents from minority groups want and if it does whether residents are able to access them. This is an issue the Mapping Diversity Group will be taking forward. The group meets regularly and consists of representatives from the Council, the police, the Multi-cultural Education Service, RSLs and the County Council.

The Open Out scheme for Huntingdonshire and Fenland was launched in April 2003 taking the scheme county wide. Open Out is a local Partnership scheme designed to encourage the reporting of racial and homophobic incidents, otherwise known as Hate Crime. The idea behind the scheme is to encourage people to report incidents without having to go to a police station. Reporting centres are situated throughout the district and county and aim to be user friendly. Examples of reporting centres are, libraries, CAB, McDonalds, Job Centres, Council offices and sports centres.

Our Key Future Priorities are to:

- **complete the Stock Condition Survey and fully analyse the results to inform the future targeting of advice, resources, and enforcement action**
- **encourage people with special housing needs to register on to the Council's Special Needs Register**
- **ensure the Housing Strategy remains compatible with Regional Planning Guidance and with other regional or sub-regional initiatives in addressing housing need.**

CHAPTER 3 MAXIMISING ACCESS TO HOUSING OPTIONS

Our Aims are to:

- **prevent homelessness and reduce its detrimental effects**
- **make the best use of all housing resources to meet needs**
- **encourage owner occupation where appropriate and support existing owners.**

Our Key Objectives are to:

- **provide advice to households on the range of housing services available to assist their decision-making**
- **improve the range and accessibility of information**
- **assist people with special housing needs to achieve or maintain independence**
- **continue to identify all empty property and encourage owners to bring properties back into beneficial use where appropriate.**

Housing Options:

Advice and Support

Good quality housing advice on the range of housing options available, and realistic prospects of a successful outcome, is essential. For some years, the Council has provided comprehensive advice to assist residents to remain in their own homes, through intervention with landlords or mortgagors, or by referral for improvement grants. Comprehensive advice is given on the availability of social rented housing and the likelihood of rehousing, and the Rent Deposit/Rent in Advance Scheme has assisted those seeking private rented housing. Advice is also available on house purchase where this is a feasible solution. All Housing Register applicants are visited in their home and advisory services are easily accessible to all residents in the District. Close links with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), which receives funding from the Council, and the Huntingdon Independent Advice Centre (HIAC) ensures that residents can obtain independent housing advice, and that there is a mechanism for challenging the Council's decision-making process in individual cases. With these partners a Court Advocacy Service has been developed to assist those households going through the Court process. The provision of this new service and the follow-up actions taken have helped prevent homes from being repossessed and had a positive impact on the prevention of homelessness.

Young and Single People

The Council's specialist Housing Advice Officer (Young Persons) provides a valuable service to young people by negotiating with landlords and parents to retain or obtain accommodation. Work in schools with 15 and 16 year olds to advise them of the difficulties and costs of finding housing is raising awareness and contributing to the stated aim of preventing homelessness. The programme of introducing housing issues as part of the curriculum has been extended to other schools across the district in order to increase awareness with young people. This service will become increasingly valuable given the anticipated increase in the housing need of vulnerable young people as a result of the extension of the priority needs groups, which has been introduced by new legislation.

The Council has also piloted a mediation service for vulnerable young people faced with homelessness. The scheme, run by an independent agency, aims to avoid emergency homelessness situations as a result of breakdowns in family relations. The scheme and the referral system has been widely publicised with partner agencies, so that young people and their families may access the service with the aim of preventing homelessness wherever possible. The pilot will continue for the coming year, after which its successes will be evaluated.

The Rent Deposit/Rent in Advance Scheme, which seeks to help low income households gain tenancies in the private rented sector, has continued to successfully assist applicants in gaining access to this housing tenure. With a view to preventing rather than responding to housing crises, applicants no longer need to be homeless or threatened with homelessness in order to access the scheme. Also, to further facilitate choice, applicants need not be on the Housing Register but may have a preference for private renting but cannot afford the entry costs. To reduce the burden of repayment, a bond system has been introduced as an alternative option to a deposit loan. For qualifying applicants, this scheme now forms part of a co-ordinated approach to advice and assistance for people wanting to rent in the private sector.

Home Ownership

Home ownership is one of a range of housing options discussed with those seeking housing. In the past year, local publicity of shared ownership initiatives has increased and we have a database of interested people from the Housing Register with sufficient income and savings. As a result, the Council can fully assess local need and will be considering the inclusion of shared ownership properties on a number of new developments. Bids by RSLs to the Housing Corporation for Voluntary Purchase Grant will continue to be supported. The Council will continue to monitor the use of receipts by RSLs to ensure money is recycled into affordable housing provision, and it will continue to encourage applicants wishing to take up Homebuy initiatives.

Home Maintenance

The Huntingdonshire Home Improvement Agency (HHIA) provides homeowners and private tenants with advice and support to obtain funding for repairs and adaptations to their homes. This is largely achieved through the use of disabled facilities grants, house renovation grants, and home repairs assistance grants. Advice is given to clients on alternative housing options as part of the Agency's role.

Debt Counselling

The debt counselling advice service has been developed to include both clients approaching the Council directly for advice, and those using the Court Advocacy Service where debt issues have led to possession action which could lead to the loss of their home. This involves Officers attending the County Court and working proactively with individuals to address issues which may ultimately prevent their homelessness.

Another function of the debt counselling advice service has been to assist households on the Housing Register in resolving outstanding rent related debts that would otherwise have prevented their acceptance for rehousing by some RSLs.

Access to Housing and Choice

The Council has completed a review of its Housing Register policy and Points System, and this is soon to be implemented. Negotiations have continued with RSL partners on the possible introduction of a Common Housing Register for Huntingdonshire. Subject to continuing agreement, it is hoped that this will be progressed in the coming year. Following on from this, once the feedback from the national Choice Based Lettings pilots has been received and considered, negotiations will commence with RSLs on the option of introducing a Choice Based Lettings Scheme within the District, in order to give as great a level of choice to housing applicants as possible.

We also recognise that keyworkers may have difficulty obtaining housing in the district and further work is being undertaken on this issue, working in partnership with RSLs, employers and other relevant agencies.

Information and Publicity:

Review of Information Provided

The range of information provided on the Housing Register will be reviewed in light of the Council's new Register policy and points system. The Council aims to develop a Register newsletter as an additional form of information for applicants and agencies.

An ongoing review of information leaflets will include consultation with a sample of service users to ensure that they are concise, informative and understandable. Customer satisfaction surveys for the various service areas will also be reviewed to offer scope for feedback on the forms and leaflets that are used to aid in their development.

We undertake customer surveys on Housing Advice, Home Visits, Housing Nominations, the Grants service and on visitors to reception. These surveys as well as complaint monitoring are vital tools used to inform and improve our services, examples of this include;

- the provision of a Homelessness liaison officer as a single contact point for households in B&B
- regular updates for clients on the progress of their grant application
- the development of initiatives to address under-occupation in social housing
- outreach surgery for young people who advised they were unable to access the advice service in Huntingdon
- court advocacy service for RSL tenants facing repossession.

For clients whose first language may not be English, access to the Cambridgeshire Interpretation and Translation Service (CINTRA) is offered and arranged for those in need of such assistance.

The Council wishes to fully promote the use of technology wherever possible and the Housing Services website presents lively and engaging access to the information and services available. For example, visitors can advertise homes to let and prospective tenants can look for homes on the accommodation finder pages. Comprehensive advice is available on a range of housing matters such as creating a tenancy or coping with debt. A wide selection of application forms and information leaflets can be downloaded and there are also links to other relevant sites. The site has also proved a useful medium to advertise fora hosted by the Council for local private landlords and letting agents, and for publishing service and performance-based information.

Registering the Need

The results of the 2002 District-wide Housing Needs Survey showed that ongoing publicity of the Housing and Special Needs Registers are essential to encourage both existing social tenants and other people in housing need to register that need (see *Chapter 2*). Overcrowded and under-occupying tenants have been targeted to increase their awareness of options, with the nominations policy being used to prioritise under-occupation.

Publicity of the Housing and Special Needs Registers has been undertaken through the local media, poster distribution to all parish and town councils, by talks arranged with Primary Care Trusts to medical practices and to day care centres, and via the Adult Care Services in Cambridgeshire Handbook. By promoting the Special Needs Housing Register through multi-agency working (see *Chapter 5*) and increasing the registration of needs, accurate matching of those with special needs to appropriately adapted RSL property vacancies becomes more effective. The Register also provides the required data to plan for unmet need within future new housing developments, individual Purchase and Repair home acquisitions, or home adaptation work.

Promoting All of Our Services

When promoting a particular service, the opportunity to publicise other housing services that may be of interest to the same target audience is seized. For example, knowledge of community alarms and disabled facilities and repairs grants can be distributed in this way. A wide range of partner agencies, including the Police Crime Prevention Unit, work with the Council to distribute letters about the community alarms purchased with Prevention Grant funding. A database of local voluntary organisations has been compiled enabling information updates on new initiatives to be sent. It also provides contact points through which we can establish carer and user consultation about our services in the future.

We will continue to publicise the Huntingdonshire Home Improvement Agency (HHIA) with all of the services and financial help that it can offer, to make sure that all of those in need are aware of the availability of grant aid. We ensure that our grants budget is spent on those in greatest financial need first and that properties are brought up to modern standards.

Homelessness Prevention and Solutions

Homelessness within the District has continued to increase year on year. In the year ending March 2003, 367 households presented as homeless compared to 304 in the previous year (a 21% increase). Of those, there was a duty towards 251 households compared to 192 in the previous year (a 31% increase).

The Housing Advice Officers carry out extensive preventative work where priority and non-priority applicants are threatened with homelessness. The two single largest causes of homelessness in the District are parents no longer willing to accommodate and loss of private rented accommodation. The loss of privately rented tenancies has seen a rise of 115% over the last two years. In many cases this appears to be as a result of landlords wishing to sell their properties, and therefore, out of the control of the Council. However, further analysis of this will take place to determine other possible contributing factors that the Council may be able to influence. Officers in these areas can carry out preventative work, but these are predominately factors that are outside of the Council's control.

Whilst numerically low as a proportion of all priority need homelessness applications, vulnerable single people are particularly difficult to assist. This is due to the high support needs of many who have a mental health, drug or alcohol abuse problems. This is compounded by the relative scarcity of accommodation suited to their needs. The mediation

service previously referred to will try to help vulnerable young people stay in their family home, where appropriate, and work towards a more planned approach of resolving their housing issues.

The floating support service provided by Huntingdonshire Housing Partnership means that this vulnerable client group, as well as others, may benefit from receiving additional support in order to help them sustain a tenancy when they are rehoused.

Close liaison and co-operation with health, Social Services, Police and Probation Service colleagues is essential if a successful outcome is to be achieved. Regular discussions occur to gain a better understanding of respective partners' constraints and difficulties. The Cambridgeshire Housing Advice Group, comprising Housing Advisors from all Cambridgeshire local authorities, enables both operational and strategic issues to be explored and benchmarking issues to be discussed. Additionally, the multi-agency Advisory Groups for two single persons' schemes within Huntingdonshire facilitate discussion on wider issues around single homelessness in the area. RSL partners' willingness to assist and rehouse more challenging clients, with appropriate support packages, is also crucial now that the Council no longer holds any housing stock.

The increase in homelessness has inevitably led to an increased demand for temporary accommodation. As it is recognised that the use of temporary accommodation can disrupt family life, the Council aims to provide the most appropriate temporary accommodation available for individual households, and to minimise lengths of stay in all forms of temporary accommodation. As Bed and Breakfast accommodation is accepted as the most unsatisfactory form of temporary housing, the over-riding aim is to minimise its use. It is only used as a last resort in emergency situations where other alternatives are not available.

The Council has continued looking at ways of trying to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The initiative with HHP to provide self-contained properties for homeless households from their existing stock on a short-let basis has, therefore, been extended to 20 properties. Negotiations have commenced with other RSL partners to provide additional temporary properties including the possible development of a Private Sector Lease scheme.

With regard to asylum seekers, the Council has assisted with the East Anglia-wide mapping of the location and percentage of residents from different ethnic groups in order to assess future needs. However, the National Asylum Support Service has tended to seek accommodation within larger conurbations in Cambridgeshire, such as Peterborough.

Homelessness Review and Strategy

The Council has completed a review of homelessness in the district and is due to publish its strategy to address the issues raised. This process has coincided with the conclusion of a Best Value Review considering Social Inclusion for those households that are placed into temporary accommodation due to homelessness. This is a multi-agency review considering the experiences and issues faced by families in temporary accommodation in accessing and using services. It has focussed on issues relating to health, education, housing and the support services provided through Social Services and has proved invaluable in making the multi-agency links required to complete the homelessness review. It has also laid the foundations to develop the necessary multi-agency approach to address the issues raised in the strategy.

Using Empty Properties

The Council's Empty Homes Strategy provides a close analysis of the local problem and details the Council's plan to deal with it. This year is also the third annual cycle of good quality information derived from the Council Tax database. This confirms that the great majority of local homes empty for above six months are transactional voids that are cleared by the market in due course. There is a relatively small empty homes problem with less than 0.1% of the stock (fewer than 60 properties) standing empty without apparent good reason. The 60 identified problematic properties are the focus of the Council's attention. Of these, 2 have been brought back into use by an application for a renovation grant under the Empty Homes Grant policy. The Council has the right to nominate a household from the Council's Housing Register to the tenancy and set a sub-market rent for 5 years.

Our Key Future Priorities are to:

- **involve RSL partners in investigating the option of a Common Housing Register for the District**
- **develop further the electronic access to information in line with the Council's corporate e-government targets**
- **produce a strategy by the 31st July 2003, to address the issues raised from the homelessness review, in consultation with local stakeholders and service users**
- **minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and reduce the length of stay for homeless families with children to a maximum of 6 weeks by April 2004**
- **increase the type and location of good quality temporary accommodation available to homeless households through local partnership initiatives**
- **develop further the mediation service for homeless vulnerable young people.**

Our other Priorities are to:

- **develop further the Debt Counselling Advice Service and Court Advocacy Service with local partner agencies**
- **investigate the option of a Choice Based Lettings Scheme with RSL partners in the District**
- **ensure that housing advice and information is accessible to black and minority ethnic residents**
- **integrate the Empty Homes Strategy into other corporate policies with a view to achieving a year-on-year reduction in the number of empty homes**
- **continue to work with Social Services to enhance and promote services for young people.**

CHAPTER 4 PROMOTING SAFE, WARM AND HEALTHY HOMES

Our Aims are to:

- minimise the risk to health by encouraging safe, healthy homes and environments
- maximise individuals' life chances by reducing poor housing conditions and social exclusion
- encourage the repair and improvement of the District's housing stock
- maximise external partnerships for improving thermal comfort.

Our Key Objectives are to:

- increase partners' awareness of the effect of poor housing on health and the range of housing solutions through joint working
- continue to provide grant funding, particularly for low income households, to improve living conditions and maintain independent living
- continue to target resources and services at those in most need and at properties in worst condition in conjunction with partner agencies
- continue to promote energy efficiency measures to reduce cold and dampness; and to promote thermal comfort
- achieve a steady improvement in the energy efficiency of the District's stock.

Our Strategic Involvement

Housing has a major role to play in people's safety and well-being. The Council recognises the responsibility it has for sustaining the environment in which people live. The existence of a safe, warm and healthy home maximises the life chances of local residents. The Council also recognises that the main emphasis in the Governments recent Energy White Paper 'Our energy future – creating a low carbon economy' is on energy efficiency. The Governments intention is the delivery of the reduction in emissions of CO₂ by 60% by 2050, as recommended by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and work will continue to achieve a steady improvement in the energy efficiency of the District's stock.

Housing, environmental health, health promotion, community safety and community initiatives Officers all actively participate with the Police, Cambridgeshire Health Authority, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), Social Services and voluntary sector at both District-wide and County level in a number of joint planning groups.

The County-wide, multi-disciplinary Public Health and Inequalities Advisory Group has the responsibility of advising and supporting the Cambridgeshire HImP. Detailed work is taken forward by sub-groups. Outcomes include a shared understanding of the ways in which housing impacts on the health of individuals and families, providing examples of and sharing best practice and identification of the scope for partnership activity.

The work areas of the Advisory Group include falls prevention for the elderly, affordable warmth and the development of future work based on the Acheson report "*Inequalities in Health*". An example of the group's work was the Affordable Warmth Seminar held in March 2001, which brought together relevant professionals and voluntary groups from across the County to raise awareness and review the issue of fuel poverty locally and nationally, to examine current schemes from elsewhere in the UK, and to establish links useful to strategy

development at both District and County level. The Council has further improved its links with occupational therapists and health visitors to provide these professionals with grant information and advice on identifying cold, damp homes and households which may benefit from energy efficiency improvements.

The Health for Huntingdonshire Partnership, which includes the PCT and Hinchingsbrooke NHS Trust, was established several years ago. The Partnership aims to reduce inequalities in health by addressing the causes of social exclusion and promoting sustainable regeneration. Attracting additional external funding is a key element and a successful bid has been made for £1.4 million of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funds. This funding is being locally managed by the Oxmoor Community Action Group. Most of the outputs projected to the end of 2001-02 have been met, and in many instances exceeded. The role of the community in general and in organised groups is becoming more central. The established Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) will take forward the responsibility in the changed NHS system for the further development of a Huntingdonshire HIMP, which will build on the last Cambridgeshire HIMP.

With the work of the Partnership in the Oxmoor area of Huntingdon now well established through the SRB Programme, the Partnership is now focusing on two rural areas and the market town of St Neots. It is developing links with other agencies in the Ramsey area, notably with Cambridgeshire ACRE and the Ormiston Children and Families Trust. Data collection for needs analysis purposes has been largely completed, with funding from the Countryside Agency, and progress is now being made towards an Action Plan for the area. The needs appraisal work has been extended to Yaxley, south of Peterborough, and has begun in St Neots with an emphasis on Eynesbury.

Accident Prevention in the Home

The Council has contributed to multi-agency "*Child Safety Action Zones*" which have proved to be very popular and two more are planned in the District. It will contribute to these with the Food Safety and Home Safety stand, and the Dog Warden will attend to give advice on dog care and management. The Trustees of the Moor Community Centre, Sapley Square have taken over the management of the Community Action Safety Equipment (CASE) project previously managed by the Primary Care Trust. The CASE project provides access to low cost fire guards and stair gates, to families with small children on low income.

The over 75's check by GP's and the NHS Trust Falls Project continue to be explored through the PCT as methods by which those vulnerable to falling may be identified and referred to agencies, including housing, for preventative intervention. A home safety common assessment tool for health professionals working with the elderly is under development by Social and Health Services in partnership, and a pilot project is underway at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

A multi-agency project led by the Accident Prevention Group in partnership with Oxmoor Community Action Group, targets high risk Oxmoor residents for life-long smoke alarms. Through schools and community groups vulnerable young families, the elderly and disabled are identified for targeting purposes. Some 60 alarms have been installed and the Group are seeking further funding from the SRB Community Chest Fund (which has been established to support low-cost local initiatives) to continue these works.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

The Council recognise the importance of HMOs in the local housing market and that this type of property is often occupied by the most vulnerable members of society although frequently

offering the worst type of living conditions. The number of HMOs fluctuates and there are presently known to be 44 in the District, all of which are programmed for inspection and assessment using a risk-based approach to enforcement. A HMO Registration Scheme was introduced in November 2002 following the approval of the Secretary of State. An information booklet for landlords and tenants is being developed to provide guidance on relevant standards in HMOs.

Unfit Housing

Although local levels of unfitness are well below the national level, the Council recognises that housing investment and intervention is required in specific cases to bring properties up to an acceptable standard and also to prevent further deterioration of the stock. In the private rented sector this is achieved by the use of enforcement and enabling powers.

Improving Community Safety

The crime rate in Huntingdonshire is lower than the national and County crime rates. However, lack of material wealth is a factor in crime and disorder issues. Although overall, Huntingdonshire has less deprivation than other Cambridgeshire districts, there are 15 smaller areas that are in the most deprived 10% in Cambridgeshire, with 5 being in Huntingdon and 4 in St Neots. Huntingdon and St Neots in particular have higher than average levels of disorder, which are directly related to higher levels of deprivation. Anti-social behaviour was one of the highest concerns expressed by Citizens' Panel representatives, and there is an established link between drug and alcohol misuse and such behaviour.

The Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership is the vehicle for multi-agency working arising from the crime and disorder audit. A range of solutions is being used to tackle and reduce crime in these areas and address underlying causes. As part of the Community Safety Strategy, five geographical task groups have been established as well as a specific group that tackles Domestic Violence and one that tackles Hate Crime, known as the Open Out Scheme. Task groups are based geographically on the four main towns plus Yaxley, and action plans have been developed by these Task Groups to address issues such as anti-social behaviour.

Action to address domestic violence issues is co-ordinated through the Huntingdonshire Domestic Violence Forum. Work on a safe house has now been completed, relevant procedures for referrals and move-on have been agreed with the managing agent, and households in need can now be referred to the safe house. A protocol is also being developed with RSL partners aimed at assisting dangerous ex-offenders with a view to enhancing the management of risk. The Police and Probation Service will play a key role towards the formation of an agreed protocol.

The Community Safety Partnership carried out extensive consultation in 2001 as part of the new crime and disorder audit. This has informed the next 3-year strategy which commenced in April 2002. The main issues highlighted in the Strategy are domestic burglary, criminal damage, theft from motor vehicles, and anti-social behaviour.

Investing in the Private Sector

Results from the ongoing external Stock Condition Survey confirm that an area renewal strategy for the private sector is inappropriate, as there is no spatial concentration of properties in poor repair. However, demographic and other social and economic developments may lead to a growing private sector repair problem. Over the past two

decades the right-to-buy for tenants, the contraction of the social rented sector, and an enthusiasm for home ownership has extended owner-occupation from 50% to almost 70% of all households. As a result there are now many homeowners on relatively modest incomes. An important component of this tenure shift is an increase in the number of elderly home owners who, while owning outright an appreciating asset, have little by way of a disposable income. At the same time, rising house prices are driving less affluent younger households into the lower and less well maintained sector of the second-hand housing market.

More affluent and mobile households may be able to avoid or defer the true long-term cost of home ownership by moving house, but a population of settled older homeowners may not have this option or may be reluctant to exercise it. Some older homeowners also see their home as a sacrosanct repository of wealth rather than an asset to be maintained.

For all these reasons demand for grant assistance is steadily rising. The Council is committed to investing in the private sector, but it is essential to have a policy that fairly, openly and accountably distinguishes between competing claims. In April 2003 the Council published its Housing Renewal Assistance Policy as a response to the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. It reaffirms the policy to target funding at the most vulnerable members of the community in accordance with the principles outlined in *Sustainable Communities: building for the future*. The policy also demonstrates how the award of public money will now need to be justified against the twin criterion of the ability of the owner to self-finance repairs, and the extent to which any grant brings benefit not just to the owner but the community.

Investing in the private sector means more than investing public money. It also means investing in good partnerships and good and innovative services. Excellent working relationships have been established with the Rent Service in Cambridgeshire. This means that prospective tenants using the Rent Deposit/Rent in Advance Scheme, and the private landlord and tenant advice line for Local Reference Rents, can access practical advice before they take on a tenancy they may not be able to afford.

Private landlord forum membership has grown to 48, of which around 10 - 15 attend the meetings held every 2 months. Forum members value the Council's interest in the private sector and have been impressed by the willingness of officers from Housing, Benefits and Environmental Health to make changes to policies and practices where a good case for change has been made. In the coming months, the Forum's views will be sought on whether the landlords would support a voluntary landlord accreditation scheme for the District.

Maintaining Vulnerable People at Home

The Huntingdonshire Home Improvement Agency (HHIA) has a vital role to play in helping vulnerable people to remain in their own homes. The desire of older and disabled people to remain living at home has long been accepted. The significant contribution that the Agency has made to the prevention of admission to residential or hospital care has also been recognised by Health and Social Services.

The Agency has further developed monitoring and control procedures to match the requirements of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), and Foundations, which is the national co-coordinating body for home improvement agencies.

Enabling Affordable Warmth

The Council is committed to reducing the occurrence of ill health, making residents' lives more comfortable, improving energy efficiency across all tenures and promoting environmental sustainability through reducing energy consumption in housing. This is

achieved by systematically incorporating energy efficiency measures into renovation and repairs grants, and by accessing Warm Front and Energy Efficiency Commitment grants as appropriate so that a full package of measures can be delivered. Promotional initiatives are organised with both public and private sector partners.

The Council is taking a lead role in the affordable warmth sub-group within the HImP Public Health & Inequalities Advisory Group to develop County-wide, multi-agency strategies for best practice, publicity material and advice regarding affordable warmth. A multi-agency seminar was held in March 2001 and the outcomes of this are now being used to further develop work plans in this area. As part of the follow-on work the Council has contacted local medical centers directly to provide them with energy efficiency advice packs for their patients and services have been advertised in their newsletters. The benefits of energy efficiency are also advertised in Hinchingsbrooke Hospital's advice book, which is given to all staff and in-patients at the hospital. Also, a new publication has been produced for medical centers and dental surgeries throughout the District.

The Council continues to promote energy efficiency to the public, concentrating its efforts at existing local fairs and community events to which it is now routinely invited and where energy efficiency can be explained in the context of wider environmental objectives. Energy awareness is also promoted through a variety of media such as community newsletters, local press, schools and by attendance at local events such as the St Neots Green Fair. Full details of work carried out under the Council's Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) strategy and a progress report updating the Fuel Poverty Report (2000), will be presented in the 7th Progress Report (2003) under the Home Energy Conservation Act (1995).

Older and disabled groups are also targeted for publicity. Specialist assistance and demonstrations are given to the visually impaired and to arthritis sufferers, in conjunction with British Gas, the local energy advice centre and a central heating control manufacturer. The Council has also been working with Cambridgeshire Constabulary in their distraction burglary campaign, which is aimed at the elderly, disabled and their carers. Everyone attending the presentations is provided with a low energy lamp and advice pack. The presentation raises awareness of bogus firms promising council grants for insulation work and the mis-selling tactics used by some individuals to get homeowners to fuel switch.

In order to make best use of its resources and to broaden access to the target audiences, the Council has been working in partnership with neighbouring local authorities and the local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (EEAC) when running promotions. It participated in a weeklong promotion for Energy Efficiency Week in October 2002 by doing interviews, giving advice, and running adverts on local radio (X-CEL FM) along with a radio roadshow for one day in each of the authorities involved. This attracted over 500 visitors in one day, all of whom received a low energy lamp, advice on the energy efficiency of their home as well as being entered into a prize draw to win an 'A' rated energy efficient fridge freezer.

Energy efficiency was also promoted at the East of England Show in partnership with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Government Office East and with neighbouring local authorities, providing advice and low energy light bulbs to the public. The Council has developed a range of promotional material, such as 'Warmometers', children's hand-held windmills and promotional 'fuzzies' that enable it to attract the attention of a wide variety of age groups. The Council takes an active role each year during Energy Efficiency Week to promote energy efficiency. The effectiveness of different types of publicity events has been analysed using software developed by the Leicester EEAC. This complements the use of a database to calculate successive years' savings of CO₂ emissions.

The Council has also developed an Environmental Educational Resources leaflet, which will be sent out to schools. This will allow schools to see the educational resources the Council can offer to children to understand the issues surrounding waste management, litter, energy and transport and the positive impact they can have on their own environment and in their homes.

Our Key Future Priorities are to:

- **pursue the implementation of community regeneration and community safety initiatives in the Oxmoor area of Huntingdon**
- **encourage and promote the provision of a healthy private rented housing sector**
- **continue to promote the HHIA as a means of helping increasing numbers of vulnerable people to remain in their own homes**
- **continue to raise the awareness of energy efficiency benefits, such as enabling affordable warmth, with local partner agencies**

Our other Priorities are to:

- **participate in the implementation of the local Health Improvement Plan (HimP) and Health for Huntingdonshire Partnership with other stakeholders**
- **implement the HMO Registration Scheme to introduce a local regulatory standard for all shared housing where there is a non-resident landlord**
- **target private sector housing grants at those properties in the poorest condition, and give advice to owners on how to improve local housing stock condition**

CHAPTER 5 MEETING THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Our Aim is to:

- **maximise the benefits of multi-agency working to meet the housing needs of vulnerable people.**

Our Key Objectives are to:

- **work in partnership to implement the Cambridgeshire Supported Housing Strategy at a local level**
- **actively contribute to the local Health Improvement Programme (HImP)**
- **maintain and promote the Special Needs Housing Register to ensure need is identified**
- **encourage the provision of a range of housing options to meet identified special housing needs**
- **provide Social Housing Grant to fund special needs accommodation**
- **enable and maintain individuals' personal independence by adaptation of homes or the provision of accessible housing.**

Working in Partnership

Strategic Involvement

Housing has a key role to play in supporting community care in the District through joint working, and its importance in facilitating and maintaining independent living is being increasingly recognised by other agencies.

Since the formulation of the Cambridgeshire Supported Housing Strategy, the County Strategic Housing Group, which includes Primary Care Trusts (PCT) and Social Services colleagues, has ensured that both County-wide and local District priorities are identified and progressed through the Strategy's Implementation Plan. The Strategy sets objectives for future action relating to new and additional housing, adaptations and upgrading of property, care and support, confidentiality and information sharing, joint working and monitoring. Achievements can, therefore, be measured against targets set for action during the year.

Supporting People is the Government's policy and funding framework for support services to vulnerable people in different types of accommodation and tenure. Supporting People came into effect from 1 April 2003, and is being implemented on a Cambridgeshire-wide basis. The Council has pooled its implementation resources with other local authorities in the County and is closely involved both at officer and elected member levels. A series of service reviews has been programmed and is underway.

The County Strategic Housing Group has an important joint planning and strategic co-ordination role. Improving health and housing links, which were historically less developed than those with Social Services, is a key objective within the Supported Housing Strategy. The Group has nominated a housing representative onto each of the relevant sub groups of the HImP to ensure that the County housing perspective is properly reflected in it. The HImP's Joint Investment Plans offer opportunities for aligning housing investment with NHS and Social Services investment to meet the needs of vulnerable people in more imaginative, effective and efficient ways. The Health Act 1999 has enabled partnership flexibility to be

considered in relation to the potential for pooled budgets, integrated provision and lead commissioning. This is assisted by the co-terminous geographical boundaries of health, Social Services and Housing in Huntingdonshire, which provides the potential for future joint management of resources.

Council housing officers are members of the Joint Investment Plan Sub-Group, Adult Mental Health and Healthy Homes Sub-Groups, in addition to the local Mental Health Working Party and its Housing Sub-Group.

Although there is a long history of joint working, since the Health Authority reorganisation and the formation of Primary Care Groups, the Council has developed much closer working relationships with health colleagues both at strategic and operational levels. It is fortunate that there is now one Health Authority, essentially one Health Care Trust and only two PCTs, Huntingdon and South Peterborough, covering the District

As an active participant in the Huntingdon PCTs Older Persons' Group, a shared understanding of the housing impact on admissions prevention and hospital discharge pressures has occurred. This is facilitating the development of solutions in partnership that address pressures on the Health Service and meet identified or projected housing need.

The Council has arrangements with RSLs to provide accommodation for those with learning disabilities and those with mental health issues. Tenancies have also been provided by RSLs to help achieve independent living for those who are able to live in the community with appropriate support. However, there is an estimated need for an additional 14 tenancies each year to ensure appropriate turnover in specialist supported accommodation for those people ready for independent living.

Operational Involvement

The existence of a dedicated Special Needs Officer, whose role is to facilitate joint working with statutory and voluntary partners for the benefit of those in housing need, gives the Housing Service a considerable advantage. This enables active participation in established groups and to propose and develop initiatives in all of the above areas of work. This pivotal Officer has a significant role to play in 'signposting' housing colleagues to other agencies and similarly, directing other agencies to relevant housing services. Good relationships between Housing Services and other partners have been fostered and best practice conveyed and explored.

Regular and frequent meetings now take place with local team managers for physical disability and sensory impairment, occupational therapy, learning disability and mental health. There are improved links with the children's team through participation in the Huntingdonshire Children's Plan Locality Working Group. In addition, liaison meetings with our local Health Care Trust colleagues involved in hospital discharge and 'winter pressures' have been initiated. The Special Needs Officer is the named contact for hospital discharge staff. Special needs issues are debated with RSL colleagues through the regular housing management and housing development meetings. A special needs housing development procedure to clarify for partner agencies the route for such schemes, has been produced.

Mutual appreciation of respective agencies' funding timescales, resource and legislative constraints has been an important result of this joint working. A much greater awareness of the various housing options available and of the way in which they can be efficiently accessed now exists among partners and local residents, and this awareness will continue to be expanded.

The Special Needs Register, now in use for several years, is vital to the identification of housing need amongst vulnerable people but its use and success relies heavily upon knowledge of its existence and subsequent registration. Advocates in the statutory and voluntary sectors are of great importance. One of the main priorities has been to promote the Register and to enhance others' understanding of the need to register clients with an existing or potential housing need on the Special Needs Register.

Our Key Future Priorities are to:

- **continue to participate in the local implementation of the Cambridgeshire Supported Housing Strategy**
- **ensure the County Strategic Housing Group remains on target to deliver the Supporting People framework across Cambridgeshire by 2003**
- **further develop strategic links with health and Social Service providers as a means of meeting the needs of vulnerable people**

CHAPTER 6 DEVELOPING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Our Aims are to:

- **work in partnership with the Housing Corporation and RSLs to provide affordable housing that meets local priority need**
- **apply Local Plan affordable housing policies to meet housing need in a sustainable manner**
- **promote mixed affordable housing provision wherever possible seeking to maximise the contribution that private developers can make to meet local housing need.**

Our Key Objectives are to:

- **fund development by RSLs using Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) to meet identified needs**
- **support Housing Corporation bids by RSLs and maximise the use of those resources**
- **maximise the availability and use of housing nominations to RSL schemes**
- **monitor local RSLs and their performance standards**
- **use needs data to justify affordable housing on relevant sites**
- **maximise Section 106 opportunities for affordable housing.**

Meeting Housing Need

In Huntingdonshire, the development of new housing and refurbishment of previously developed sites by RSLs to meet the need for affordable housing has been prioritised. The major need is for social rented housing in the market towns and larger villages. Targeted needs include single persons' housing in town centres, smaller 2 bedroom family housing in St Neots and St Ives, with some 3 bedroom houses also required in St Ives. Larger houses with 4 or more bedrooms are also required in these towns. There has been particular under-provision for new affordable housing in St Ives due to a lack of development site opportunities. However, there is now a better prospect for the future with some sites being released through the Local Plan Alteration process. A Very Sheltered Housing Scheme to meet the needs of older people in St Neots commenced in the Summer 2002. This has been provided by Hanover Housing Association in partnership with the PCT. This project will also provide Intermediate Care to enable earlier release of patients from hospital. Subject to further needs analysis, additional provision for people with mental health issues is envisaged. Demand for affordable housing in smaller villages is more difficult to ascertain but schemes will be developed in accordance with identified housing need, using a local exception policy where necessary.

The Council's preference is for new build or refurbishment schemes, although purchasing good quality, existing properties throughout the District can provide a cost-effective and targeted means of meeting housing need. It can also bring empty properties back into beneficial use. Support is also given to home ownership initiatives including Homebuy, Voluntary Purchase Grants, low cost housing and shared ownership schemes where a proven need exists.

Using the Planning Process

As well as identifying additional housing sites, the Local Plan Alteration contains a revised settlement strategy and new policies to secure affordable housing. The encouragement in the Rural White Paper for maximising the supply of affordable housing secured through the planning system is welcomed, and steps have been taken to ensure that this is achieved. More explicit reference to the potential role of low-cost market housing in meeting housing needs was included in the Alteration following receipt of the Inspector's report. The site size thresholds above which affordable housing may be sought also have been revised in line with the Inspector's recommendations. The new policies require 29% of units to be provided as affordable housing, although in larger settlements (of 3,000 people or more) this is limited to sites of 25 dwellings or above (or 1 hectare+). No such limitation applies to smaller settlements. In rural areas, there is also potential for using 'exception sites' to a greater extent than in the past where there is a proven need. Parish Councils and their residents will be involved in this process.

The Council will continue to support projects that meet priority housing need. In supporting bids for Housing Corporation funding, the Council will be mindful of the regional priority themes identified in the Corporation's Regional Housing Statement.

The Local Plan Alteration takes account of Circular 6/98, which outlines the preferred approach on planning for affordable housing, and the revised Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (PPG3). The core principles within PPG3 are welcomed and reflected in the Alteration in terms of promoting development in larger settlements, maximising the use of previously-developed land (where this is in a sustainable location), increasing housing densities and promoting an appropriate mix of house sizes in new developments. All of these will help to promote a more sustainable pattern of growth. We have published draft supplementary planning guidance to indicate what constitutes an appropriate mix in new schemes of market housing, drawing upon the results of the new Housing Needs Survey.

A Design Guide for Huntingdonshire has been prepared, the key aim being to set out practical advice for developers and others on improving the quality of the built environment in a manner compatible with the objectives now set out in PPG3. A draft of the guide is being issued for public consultation this summer, following which it will be adopted as supplementary planning guidance. An Urban Capacity Study has also been as a key input to the review of the Local Plan. The study was published in January 2003, and will be updated later in 2003 to ensure that it remains up-to-date.

Discouraging private car use is another objective in government guidance, and for some years the Council has supported parking space reductions on affordable housing schemes where residents are anticipated to have low levels of car ownership. The emphasis in national guidance on development around public transport nodes is of limited significance to Huntingdonshire, which has no large urban centres. However, the planned introduction of a Cambridge to Huntingdon Rapid Transit System in 2007 will provide an express bus connection linking Huntingdon, St Ives and Cambridge and will greatly improve public transport between these key centres. Taken together with the introduction of the Ouse Valley Community Transport Scheme (from 2003), which feeds into Huntingdon and St Ives, these towns will benefit from greatly improved access by public transport. The revised Cambridgeshire Local Transport Plan will also promote the concept of public transport corridors linking major settlements, including St Neots to Cambridge.

The mismatch in the County between existing infrastructure and the scale of proposed development is a major issue that will need further consideration, and is something that the Structure Plan review has addressed. The Council supports the principle of building communities that are of a sufficient size to support facilities, and/or which are adjacent to existing schools and employment. This is compatible with its existing objectives. Similarly, there is a desire to maximise the use of empty and under-used buildings, which will contribute to bringing empty properties back into use for those in need.

Annual surveys of housing land are undertaken to determine how much is readily available to builders, and to check that Council objectives concerning land supply are being met. Local needs surveys funded by developers are encouraged where an element of affordable housing to meet local need is anticipated, or where the developer is challenging the percentage requirement. A survey brief for developers is provided and the Council analyses the results to ensure consistency of approach. Surveys are welcomed in rural villages where there is little existing evidence of housing need from usual sources, or where the Parish Council wishes to determine the level of local need.

Ensuring High Standards

To ensure that the standard of affordable housing schemes in the District is high, there is a select list of developing RSLs for general needs schemes. This is in addition to the involvement of relevant experienced or specialist RSLs and voluntary agencies for special needs schemes. The current list, which was last reviewed in 2000, contains seven RSLs.

It is anticipated that the forthcoming design guide will assist RSLs to overcome some of the practical difficulties that are encountered in their negotiations with developers. The Council will be taking the opportunity to promote energy efficiency and community safety amongst developers through design and layout guidance. It has also produced a special needs development procedure to better inform and to streamline joint working with statutory and voluntary agency partners about the development process in Huntingdonshire.

The Council accepts the principles contained in both the Egan¹ Report and the earlier Latham¹ Report. A phased introduction of changes will be required and is planned. Discussions with RSL partners concerning the Egan principles have been encouraging and some RSL partners are already pursuing such partnerships. There is concern amongst some partners that a conflict may arise on Section 106 sites and this is an aspect to be addressed in the proposed guide for developers.

The internal Best Value Review of RSL development work was completed in April 2001 and has found the service to be efficient, well managed and achieving its strategic aims. Benchmarking was identified as an area for further action and the Council has now initiated benchmarking across a range of local indicators, including development, with 42 LSVT authorities across the eastern and south east regions.

Housing Plus initiatives are welcomed as part of RSL schemes although the effect that their inclusion may have on scheme rent levels and affordability is a major concern. All RSLs are encouraged to take account of energy efficiency, community safety, and accident prevention issues in the design and layout of homes and estates.

¹ Egan and Latham reports

'Rethinking Construction' is the 1998 report of the Government's Construction Task Force, chaired by Sir John Egan. It sets our ambitious targets for improvement in the construction industry including 10% reductions in costs and time and an annual 20% reduction in defects. The report also advocates a move away from adversarial practices to long-term partnering arrangements. The report builds on earlier work contained in Sir Michael Latham's 1994 report

Affordable Rents

The high costs of home ownership and privately renting in the District mean that the availability of affordable rented housing is of considerable importance to those in need and therefore to the Council. The Council will monitor the process of rent setting closely to ensure that the rents remain affordable and that it is being consistently applied among RSLs.

Our Enabling Partnerships

Internally, close working arrangements between housing and planning colleagues for both policy and operational aspects have long ensured that all of those with an interest in affordable housing work together to achieve corporate objectives. The involvement of Housing and Planning Officers in Local Plan and Housing Strategy consultations guarantees the co-ordination of respective views. Developers and the National House Builders' Federation have made significant contributions to Local Plan Inquiry discussions.

The Council's strategic liaison has been extended to include separate development and housing management meetings with all RSL partners on a quarterly basis. Liaison with RSLs over issues of principle occurs via these meetings, in addition to regular site-specific discussions.

Our Key Future Priorities are to:

- **continue to work in partnership with RSLs to develop schemes that are affordable to those unable to access market housing**
- **implement the Alteration to the Local Plan to provide a framework for the development of affordable housing to 2006.**

Our other Priorities are to:

- **publish a design guide for developers on local affordable housing**
- **encourage RSLs to be Egan compliant and to take account of energy efficiency, community safety, and accident prevention in scheme and design layout**
- **complete the implementation of the service improvements identified in the Best Value Review.**

CHAPTER 7 RESOURCING THE STRATEGY

Our Aim is to:

- identify and utilise all possible sources of funding on schemes awarded the highest priority.

Our Key Objectives are to:

- bid for any additional resources, in partnership with others or as the sole agent, that are made available
- seek partnerships with the private sector to fund and promote energy efficiency
- offer appropriate support to Registered Social Landlords in their bids for funding from the Housing Corporation
- fully utilise planning powers to obtain land and buildings for future housing development
- maintain up-to-date and accurate information relating to the housing need and condition of the housing stock in the District on which investment priorities can be based.

Sources of Funding:

Social Housing

Social housing was previously funded by local authorities making a capital grant to registered social landlords (RSLs), to part fund schemes. The Government then reimbursed local authorities. There was, therefore, no revenue impact on local authorities but there was an equivalent reduction in their ability to finance further capital spending because of the way in which the Government's system of capital controls works.

When the Council transferred its stock in March 2000 it was anticipated that this would enable partnership working with RSLs to provide 500 homes within ten years from the date of transfer.

The previous method of providing finance for social housing has enabled the delivery of the following number of units:

| | 00/01 | 01/02 | 02/03 |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Number of units completed | 117 | 128 | 86 |
| LA Social Housing Grant | £2.5m | £3.9m | £2.5m |

Based on these results the Council anticipated exceeding its estimate of 500 additional homes but this is now subject to the new Government funding arrangements. There is still a considerable shortfall in the number of affordable homes that need to be provided in the District.

The Government ended the previous system of social housing grant from April 2003, and has introduced transitional funding arrangements for the financial year 2003/04, with residual sums for schemes, started in 2003/04, allowed for in the following two years. All housing authorities have notified Government Offices of anticipated housing schemes that comply with the Government's criteria. It is not yet known whether all submissions will be accepted or whether they will be funded in full or part.

Regional Housing Board

From April 2004 there will be a 'single housing investment pot' for the East of England. The newly formed Regional Housing Board (East of England) is to submit its recommendations on strategic priorities for funding to the Minister, informed by the East of England Regional Housing Strategy. The Government's allocations to the region for 2004/5 and 2005/6 will be announced towards the end of the calendar year (2003).

Private Sector

The private sector can provide land or financial contributions as a result of Section 106 (planning gain) agreements. As the Council no longer has any land for housing development this is now the prime source of land for affordable housing developments by RSLs.

Funding Announcements

Much of the detail on the prioritising of bids for transitional funding, the size of the regional pot and how allocations will be made from the regional pot have yet to be decided. It is critical that the allocation basis ensures that funds are available as Section 106 sites come forward to avoid the loss of land allocated for affordable housing. The Council is, therefore, unable to consider the implications for future local affordable housing schemes at this time.

As details emerge this chapter of the Housing Strategy will be revised.

Supported Housing and Services to People

The Supporting People strategy and budget is administered on a county-wide basis. HDC has representation in the strategic and decision making processes. The funding from government for 2004/05 is to be based on the spend for the year which ended March 2003, with adjustments for inflation, demographics and a government assumed saving of 2%. From 2005/06 revenue funding from government will be on formulaic approach, based on assumed and assessed need.

The Council's Own Resources

The Council has identified eight main drivers for its activities, which compete for the resources at its disposal. Although Housing is one of the defined drivers, housing in its wider sense cuts across the other drivers of health, community safety, environment, local economy and leisure.

The Council's investment planning process ensures that the resources at its disposal are targeted to schemes that will meet its long-term objectives. Schemes must demonstrate how they will help achieve one or more of these objectives. Those that relate most directly to the Housing Service are:

- Reduce economic deprivation by facilitating and maintain access to housing for those with limited financial means
- Ensure there are homes appropriate to external demands and local needs
- Assist older people and those with special needs who want to live independent lives adequately supported.

The Council, in accordance with its long term financial plan, aims to maintain the current level of investment for as long as possible rather than have years when none is likely to be available.

Current investment plans include the following allocations for housing grants:

| | 03-04 £000's | 04-05 £000's | 05-06 £000's | 06-07 £000's |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Private Sector Housing Grants: | | | | |
| Disabled Facilities Grants (gross): | 650 | 700 | 700 | 700 |
| Private Sector Renewal Grants: | 277 | 277 | 277 | 277 |

Regular reviews of available resources are carried out to ensure that the Council's development proposals are maintained at the optimum level. A corporate group currently reviews all development proposals from all services and recommends to Members those schemes that will best meet the Council's objectives. This process takes in to account value for money, cost-benefit analysis and proven need. Once resources are allocated to schemes, regular monitoring is carried out to ensure targets are met.

The Government, via its regional offices will continue the allocation of 60% capital grant funding towards the cost of Disabled Facilities Grants.

Our Key Future Housing Priorities are to:

- **provide new affordable housing, in partnership with Registered Social Landlords**
- **encourage the improvement of the existing housing stock in the District, in particular to promote the use of properties that are currently empty and to prevent the stock falling into disrepair**
- **to target grant aid at those who are unable to finance works from their own resources, as detailed in Council policy.**

Annex 1

IDENTIFIED NEEDS OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Older People

Effective housing allied to the right care support and wider services, such as good transport and community safety can be the springboard that enables older people to remain involved and live their lives to the full. Conversely, poor housing can be a fetter for older people, contributing to immobility and social exclusion, ill health and depression.

Housing has a key role to play in maintaining independent living for as long as is feasible and in helping to prevent unnecessary admission to residential care or hospital. For individuals, living at home is usually the preferred choice. Low level interventions may include the provision of a community alarm; fall detectors, minor disabled facilities works, the services of a neighbourhood warden or assistance in a sheltered or frail elderly scheme. High level interventions could include major disabled facility works or transfer to more suitable housing, with or without support.

The refocusing of Social Services' care provision to include increased private sector partnerships, the shortage of residential care and nursing home places and pressure to minimise long-term hospitalisation suggests the need for frail elderly provision.

The introduction of the new NHS Act which permits health authorities to charge local authorities for each day a person remains in hospital when medical care is no longer necessary presents new challenges for partnership working. The timeliness of support packages and adaptations to homes, as well as an adequate provision of intermediate care units are vitally important to prevent unnecessary stays in hospital with resultant recharges.

Five units of intermediate care are provided in partnership at a sheltered housing scheme owned by a RSL. The development of a very sheltered housing scheme, by a RSL, is in progress. This will deliver a further 3 units of intermediate care.

There is a continuing need to examine with RSL partners the possibilities for refurbishment, remodeling or re-provision of existing sheltered schemes where they no longer satisfy modern standards or customers' expectations. Use by alternative client groups or redevelopment for other uses may need to be considered in some cases, particularly where low demand is apparent. To establish the need and as part of Supporting People considerations a Cambridgeshire-wide Best Value Review of sheltered accommodation is underway.

There is a continuing need in town centres and larger villages for smaller properties that are suitable for older people, many of whom are under-occupying rented and owner-occupied houses that are inappropriate for their needs. Two bedroom, three person bungalows are the preferred property type (for both older people and those who are disabled) to give flexibility to accommodate a resident carer. RSLs will be encouraged to develop such housing on appropriate sites.

People with Physical Disabilities

As for older people, options range from adaptation of homes to rehousing in specially adapted properties. Needs are identified from the Council's Special Needs Register and via regular meetings with the specialist Social Services team. We have close working with occupational therapists in relation to property adaptations and when rehousing people into existing or specially designed properties.

Whilst there is an anticipated growing need for adapted, suitably accessible property in all tenures due to the rising older population, the needs of families with children who have serious mobility problems are harder to meet. The Council has been successful in addressing several outstanding cases in tailored properties in a new general needs scheme, developed in close consultation with the families concerned. Suitable accommodation for families with a disabled member remains a priority for future development.

People with Learning Disabilities

The last 12 months has seen formation of Cambridgeshire Learning Disability Partnership (LDP) whereby health and Social Services jointly commission services for this client group.

The LDP has published a *Housing and Support Strategy for adults with learning disabilities living in Cambridgeshire 2002-2006*. This is a summary of the Housing and Support Plan, which sets out how the LDP intends to develop services for people who need housing and support in Cambridgeshire. It includes people who:

- live in their own homes (tenancies or owned) but have support
- live in residential and nursing homes
- receive direct payments to buy their own support
- live with parents or carers but need support.

The plan aims to give people with learning difficulties and their carers more choice about:

- where they live
- who they live with
- who gives them support
- when they move
- the quality of life they live.

Through regular meetings at strategic, operational and project development level, the Council has made considerable progress in expanding the independence and extent of provision for people with learning disability.

The past year has seen the opening of two, six bedroom purpose built support housing bungalows, complete with en-suite bathrooms. Built to a 21st century standard for adults who previously lived in Social Services residential accommodation sharing bedrooms and bathrooms.

The principle of using high support schemes in the District for others in need in the County, where existing need from Huntingdonshire residents has already been met, has been agreed.

The needs of children leaving residential schools will have to be considered over the next few years, as will those of care leavers with a mild learning disability. An issue of concern is the hidden need that is thought to exist, where older parents of adults with learning disabilities are not registering their children on the Special Needs Register. This may cause a demand in the future, and the Council is considering with the LDP how this problem could be addressed.

The LDP in consultation with service users and partners has identified the following groups as a priority:

- adults living with older carers
- young people leaving 52 week residential education, who cannot return home once they leave school at age 19
- those in crisis eg inappropriately blocking a respite unit.

Mental Health

On the 1 April 2002 the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Mental Health Partnership became operational. It brings together mental health services previously provided by two Social Service departments and five NHS Trusts. It provides mental health and some specialist learning disability services throughout Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

The Huntingdon Mental Health Working Party and its multi-agency Housing sub-group provide the forum for discussion, identification of needs and future planning in the District.

Existing residential care provision has been reviewed and will be replaced with a 'supported living model'. This is based on the idea that a person's individual needs may be best provided for by maintaining appropriate levels of care and support within their own home.

A supported tenancies scheme that has been operating for some years, plus a more recent social care assertive outreach scheme have been important services for this group in the District. There is, however, insufficient accommodation of an appropriate type for those rendered homeless, or those whose behaviour leads to a tenancy breakdown. There is only limited direct access provision in the District for such clients.

Young People

A small private rented sector, high house prices, and a desire for independent living has increased the need for single person accommodation. As a result of concerted efforts over the last few years to address the needs of young single people in the District, there is now a good range including a foyer, a single persons' housing scheme for 16-30 year olds with life skills support, and support to independent tenancies. All of the supported schemes have multi-agency advisory and allocation panels.

As a result of the Children Act more looked after children are remaining in their existing placements until the age of 18. This has proved to be an additional source of referrals to the Young Persons' Project. This project provides supported self contained accommodation dispersed across the district.

The Council's dedicated Housing Advice Officer (Young Persons) continues to provide an invaluable prevention, intervention, advice, educational and accommodation-finding service. The implementation of the Young Persons' Protocol will lead to improved inter-agency working. However, the current absence of sufficient, suitably supportive accommodation for 16-18 year olds deemed to be vulnerable and the consequent inability to fully meet the needs of this group is of great concern and will need to be addressed.

Young Lone Parents

There are four units of accommodation in the district for teenage lone parents. This provision followed the identification of need by the Social Services' Leaving Care team. The Council is a member of the newly formed *Huntingdonshire Teenage Parent Strategy Working Group*.

The number of units provided, whilst being kept under review, is considered as appropriate. The extent of this problem locally is not high in comparison with national indicators.

Alcohol/Substance Misusers

Local specialist RSLs and voluntary agencies are beginning to identify a gap in provision for those with a drug or alcohol abuse issues, particularly in relation to ex-offenders. This group is now presenting with higher dependencies and consequently more complex needs. The Supported Housing Information Project (SHIP) is being explored as a potential resource for carrying out work in this area to assist in identifying needs. Once this has been done, possible future solutions will be discussed with partner agencies.

Hidden homelessness amongst this group, and residents returning to the District following rehabilitation, generate a need for housing which is required to assist individuals to make lifestyle changes.

Dual diagnosis clients, whose mental health is adversely affected by substance misuse, are a particular challenge that will need addressing with housing providers. Such individuals have difficulty in securing and maintaining their own accommodation.

People with HIV/AIDS

Consultation with PCT colleagues suggests that this client group is characterised by hidden homelessness, a desire to return to the area for relatives' support and difficulties in obtaining or retaining accommodation in hostels or the private rented sector. The resultant lack of settled housing can increase the risk of an unhealthy or chaotic lifestyle. Conversely, appropriate housing can break this cycle. Ground floor accommodation is desirable due to commonly experienced symptoms of sight impairment or physical disability.

The challenges faced in meeting individuals' housing needs are compounded when they have complex needs that place them in more than one special needs grouping. Risks to these individuals, other residents and to the agencies involved are heightened. The Council intends to continue to work closely with partners to address these needs.

There are currently 3 people registered on the Council's special needs register.

Ex-Offenders

Changes to homelessness legislation mean that ex-offenders may now be categorised as vulnerable and could be considered as in need of supported accommodation when leaving institutionalised housing.

There are 6 units of supported housing accommodation for ex-offenders. This accommodation is provided by a RSL that also provides an outreach service for 2 offenders at their own accommodation.

Research into the housing and support needs of ex-offenders has been produced which indicates a need for further accommodation and services.

Alongside other groups of vulnerable people, the housing needs of ex-offenders will form part of the considerations of the county-wide Supporting People Strategy and investment plan.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you would like additional copies of this Housing Strategy or any of the following related documents please contact us.

Housing Strategy Summary 2004-07
Reading the Housing Market July 2003
Private Sector Housing Strategy 2004-07
BME Strategy 2003-04
Homelessness Strategy 2004-07
Home Energy Conservation Act – 6th Progress Report (2002)
Empty Homes Strategy

If you have any comments on any of our documents or you would like to be involved in the ongoing consultation we undertake on the District's Housing Strategy please contact us.

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RESOURCING THE STRATEGY

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ANNEX 1

IDENTIFIED NEEDS OF VULNERABLE
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