

Executive Summary

Introduction

This Strategy sets out the Council's short, medium and longer term plans for housing and housing services in the District. It presents the findings of research into housing need and specifies our plans to meet the defined need within the context of the Council's wider strategic objectives and the Government's housing objectives.

The actions set out in the Strategy place a greater emphasis on Partnership working. It has been recognised that the chances of success are greater by working effectively with key partners. In producing this Strategy, we have consulted with and been supported by key partners to ensure that policies and targets are joined up. This maximises effective delivery across a range of objectives.

The Strategy replaces the Housing Strategy 2004-09 with new targets for the period 2007/12, taking into account changes which has occurred at a National, Regional and local level.

Rother Background and Demographics

The Rother District covers 509 square kilometres and serves a population of 87,243 inhabitants. With the exception of Bexhill, with its distinctive town centre and seaside character, and the historic market towns of Battle and Rye, the area is mainly rural. The majority of the countryside located within the District falls within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The 2006 mid-year estimates shows the population in the District to be 87,243, of which approximately 41,635 live in Bexhill, 6,227 in Battle and 4,159 live in Rye. 28.3% of the population are over 65 and Rother has the highest proportion of residents aged over 85 of all local authorities in England and Wales (*Source: 2001 Census, ONS*). Total BME population for Rother is approximately 3.1%, comparable to East Sussex generally, but lower than average BME population regionally (6.4%) and nationally (10.5%).

An analysis of local incomes (Housing Needs Survey 2005) shows that over 50% of Rother residents are on an annual income of less than £20,000.

What has been achieved since our last Strategy?

- ✓ Mandatory licensing for certain types of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) was introduced by the Government in April 2006. By December 2006 the Council had inspected and licensed the majority of HMO's known to require a licence.
- ✓ Housing Aid Policy – in 2007 we will be introducing a limited number of decent home improvement grants.
- ✓ Equity Release Scheme – In writing its Housing Aid Policy, the council agreed to cover the set up costs of loans to encourage and enable owner-occupiers to maintain their properties
- ✓ Disabled Facilities Grants – In the financial year 2005/06 the Council administered 58 Mandatory

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Disabled Facilities Grants totalling £421,956. During the same period 64 discretionary Home Maintenance Grants were competed at a cost of £210,361.

- ✓ Heca Officer in post – In October 2005 the Council appointed a Home Energy Conservation Officer. The post is shared with Wealden District Council.
- ✓ Protocol between Housing Services and their RSL partners regarding disrepair complaints
- ✓ During 2005/06 a total of 31 affordable homes were completed. For the current year (at 1/10/06) 40 affordable homes have been completed. This is a significant increase on the previous year, however, falls short of our target. Projects (Exception Site and Mixed income housing schemes) have been put in place which should see a further increase of provision in the coming years.
- ✓ Joint working protocol with Planning
- ✓ Local Plan and Affordable Housing SPD
- ✓ Extra Care Housing – Newington Court, an extra care housing scheme for older people has been developed at Ticehurst
- ✓ Housing Needs survey 2005
- ✓ Housing Market Assessment – jointly with Hastings Borough Council
- ✓ B & B target met
- ✓ Prevention of Youth Schools programme

Local, Regional and National Priorities

The Housing Strategy is developed to put in place a strategic framework for the delivery of housing and housing related services throughout the district. In doing

so, it must consider, influence and be influenced by the policies and priorities of its local, national and regional partners. It does this by linking to Strategies such as, at a local level, the Community Plan and Corporate Strategy; at a Regional and sub-regional level, the Health Improvement Plan, The South East Plan and Regional Housing Strategy and at a National level the Government's Strategies regarding housing, homelessness and Sustainable Communities.

The Housing Market – supply and demand

In order to develop an effective strategy, it is essential to have an understanding of the housing supply, as well as demand for the area; and what factors are the key drivers in the market. Evidence gathered via Housing Needs surveys, Housing Market Assessment and local market intelligence has been used to inform this Strategy.

Key features of the housing market (Hastings & Rother):

- Comparatively low, but rising, house prices
- Declining affordability for local people
- An unusual population profile
- Growth of the private rented sector
- High levels of deprivation

The Council no longer own any housing stock, having transferred via LSVT (Large Scale Voluntary Transfer) to Rother Homes in 1998. Currently Housing Association stock in the District accounts for 10.5% of all housing stock. This is significantly less than the national figure of 19.1% and demonstrates the added pressure for those seeking affordable housing in the Rother District.

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The salary required in Rother for a single person/earner is £32,062 to buy a two or three bedroom property; average weekly salary for a full time worker in Rother is £22,100. This is a total of £10,000 less than the required lowest quartile salary for a single earner buying a two or three bed property in the District.¹

The Housing Needs survey 2005 found that around 3.9% of households contained one or more households seeking independent accommodation giving a total of 1,523 cases over the next 3 years to 2008. Over 94% are the adult children of existing residents.

Needs and preferences for specific home types:

Size	Need %	Preference %	Current stock %
1 bed	43.6	8.7	11
2 bed	54.3	80.6	34.4
3 bed	2.1	10.7	35.9

Other key findings from the survey:

- 9% of households live in accommodation unsuitable for their needs. Satisfaction varies from 97% in the owner occupied (no mortgage) sector to 65% in the private rented sector;
- The average price of flats and terraced houses are £127,267 and £174,884 respectively and affordability is a major issue, particularly for new forming households;
- 76% cannot afford private rental and home ownership is beyond the reach of 83% of concealed households.

¹ Source: The Geography of Affordable and unaffordable housing (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2005)

Only 5% of them earn over £27,300p.a.; the national average;

- The social stock is 11.3%, lower than the national average of 19.3% and provides 337 re-let units per year, of which 130 are sheltered re-lets. Annually 593 affordable housing units are needed, 256 more than existing re-let supply;
- There is a requirement to develop a more balanced housing stock in both sectors with a need for more flats and terraced houses, particularly in the private sector;
- The retired population will increase significantly by 35.5% by 2021. There is an inextricable link between ageing and disability. 70% of those with a support need are over 60, and over half (52%) have a walking difficulty.

The Housing Needs Survey 2005, which was undertaken on a sub-regional basis, also looked at the needs of vulnerable clients by conducting specialist interviews amongst older people, younger people and those with a learning disability. Interviews were also carried out amongst BME people as part of the study. Recommendations from the Survey have been used to formulate our action plans, which are available as an appendix to the Housing Strategy main document.

Resources

The Council's Affordable Housing Programme is confined to sums gained through S106 commuted sums and an aspirational budget funded from available resources when, for example, a scheme requires Council funding following discussion and agreement via the Council's

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Capital Monitoring Group and Members of the Council. A number of housing projects have been agreed for delivery via the Council's Executive Priority programme; these projects will be funded, subject to Member approval, from the Council's resources.

The Council has considered and implemented other initiatives such as partnership working to expand the resources available. Examples of this are the Youth Prevention of Homelessness Project – additional resources were acquired through partnership working with the PCT. Another example is the Equity Release Scheme – by directly funding the fees involved with equity release, rather than providing a grant or loan, resources can be used in a more targeted manner.

The Council has supported a number of bids (and will continue to do so) made by partner RSLs in the District for the 2006-08 Housing Corporation bidding round. The resulting allocations will enable the development of 72 homes throughout the district.

The Council also provides revenue funding for a number of Housing related services:

Service	Total £
Sub standard housing	111,060
Houses in Multiple Occupation	101,020
Home Energy Conservation Act	41,640
Housing Policy, Strategy and Development	127,510
Housing Needs	152,670
Private Sector Housing	146,760

Housing Administration Account	137,810
Homelessness & Prevention	165,980
Hastings Advice & Representation Centre	13,600
Hastings & Rother CAB	69,770
Shelter	6,750
Hastings Furniture Service	2,000
Hastings & Rother Bond Board	2,310
In-Touch Home Improvement Agency	39,900
Rother Homes Aids and Adaptations	10,000
Total	1,128,780

Capital funding for Private Sector Housing – The Council identified that demand for Disabled Facilities Grants was increasing and took steps to secure an increased allocation in 2006/07 for £400,000 to £500,000. Members supported the related increase in the Council's 40% contribution.

The Council appointed a Home Energy Conservation Officer in 2005. A new budget was provided for the development of an Affordable Warmth Strategy and the implementation of related schemes. Where possible the budget is used to match fund contributions from partner organisations.

Priorities

The three key aims of the Housing Strategy are:

- Provision of Affordable Housing
- Private Sector Housing Renewal
- Prevention of Homelessness

In order to ensure achievement of the aims, an analysis of options available has been carried out, in consultation

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and with the support of the Strategy Monitoring Groups². This exercise assisted in setting out the actions required to achieve the aims of the Housing Service. Added to this, following on from the adoption of the Council's Corporate Strategy in April 2006, a number of Executive Priority Projects were agreed. Housing Projects included in the programme are:

- Mixed Income Housing Schemes (Housing Objective: Delivering Affordable Homes)
- Rural Exception Site Project (Housing Objective: Delivering Affordable Homes)
- Affordable Warmth Strategy (Housing Objective: Private Sector Housing Renewal)
- Sanctuary Scheme (Housing Objective: Prevention of Homelessness)
- Assessment of HMO Units (Housing Objective: Private Sector Housing Renewal)
- Sheltered Housing Improvements (Housing Objective: Delivering Affordable Homes)
- Prevention of Youth Homelessness Campaign (Housing Objective: Prevention of Homelessness)

Targets linked to the three aims are:

Aim1 – Delivering Affordable homes

- Increase the provision of affordable housing to meet identified local needs
- Improve delivery of new affordable housing in rural areas

² Strategy Monitoring Groups are made up of key Officers from RDC and partner stakeholders

- Develop a range of assistance for key workers to access the housing market
- Provide more opportunities for low cost ownership
- Maintain information on housing needs at local level, working with and involving Ward and Parish Councils, key stakeholders and the Community
- Meet the needs of vulnerable households through new housing supply

Aim 2 – Prevention of Homelessness

- Reduce total annual levels of homelessness in the District by 25%
- Reduce the levels of repeat homelessness in the District
- Reduce levels of homelessness against the main causes: Parental/friend eviction
- Reduce levels of homelessness against the main causes: Domestic Violence
- Reduce levels of homelessness against the main causes: Landlord eviction
- Meet the needs of vulnerable people who may be at risk of homelessness
- Reduce the numbers of homelessness clients in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010 and increase access to settled homes
- Meet the needs of vulnerable households through new and existing housing supply
- Meet the need of all Rother residents who are in housing need by ensuring housing advice, information and access to services is equally available to all
- Raise awareness of local housing needs in the local community and ensure involvement of local

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community, service users and stakeholders in future shaping and improvement of services

Aim 3 – Private Sector Housing Renewal

- Identify and licence all HMOs subject to mandatory licensing
- Continue to tackle the £113 million backlog of repairs and sub-standard private sector housing (removing Category 1 and reducing Category 2 hazards)
- Provide Housing Assistance to elderly and vulnerable residents to ensure they are able to live in safe and secure decent homes
- Assist disabled households in the District, by granting DFGs
- Bring into use empty homes per annum, from the private sector, making these available for clients accepted as homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Supporting initiatives for improving home security through the Home Improvement Agency
- Encourage good relations and partnerships with Private Sector Landlords
- Reduce fuel poverty and increase SAP levels

Delivery and Monitoring of the Housing Strategy

The actions set out in the Housing Strategy (main document) will feed into the Housing section's Service Plan for implementation. The Executive Priority Projects, as outlined above, will be managed by lead Officers and each has been assigned a 'Champion' to ensure the driving forward and success of the programme.

The Council's performance is monitored through RTPM (Real Time Performance Management). This is a tool used for managing performance across the organisation. The system allows Officers to input monitoring information on a quarterly basis, with reports going to Members to ensure awareness, monitoring and effective action planning.

Stakeholder Strategy monitoring groups have been in place since 2004 and meetings of the Groups take place on a quarterly basis. There are three groups, each concentrating on one of the three aims – Providing affordable homes; Prevention of homelessness and Private Sector Housing Renewal. This enables the groups to effectively monitor and develop the targets set out in the action plans. The groups are also an excellent forum to agree improvements in Service provision and have been utilised as a consultation tool in the development of this Strategy.

Conclusion

The Strategy sets out Rother District Council's future plans for affordable housing and housing services in the District. The resulting action plans are based on evidence of the needs and demands of the District set out from recommendations from Housing Needs Surveys, Housing Market Analysis and market intelligence gathered at local levels. By working with our partners and stakeholders, using the information gathered and looking into the options available to the way we provide our services, we believe we have set out some ambitious targets. The actions needed to realise these targets have been discussed at length with our partners and

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consideration has been given as to how joint working and joint targets can have a significant impact.

In setting targets, we have considered National and Regional priorities, balancing these with the needs of our local communities. Resources, both Capital and Revenue, and the availability through various sources, are key to the success of our plans. Targeting resources to priorities is vital, as is careful consideration to future availability of these resources. Capitalising on partnership working can often be the key to unlocking resources available through other routes. Rother is committed to working in partnership to ensure all resources available are accessed.

The Housing Strategy sets out Rother's commitment to improving its services to the Community, not just in terms of housing provision, but the wider agenda of community sustainability. This can not be done in isolation; Housing Services are committed to working with the Community and its Partners to ensure improvements are linked also to other core public services such as health, social care and policing.

Delivering on the set targets will improve the quality of life and contribute to the wider regeneration, sustainability and well-being of our communities, creating places that people want to live, work and invest in.

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