



STAFFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING STRATEGY 2008 – 2013

HOMES FOR OUR COMMUNITY



Stafford
BOROUGH COUNCIL







Stafford Borough Council

Housing Strategy - 2008 – 2013

“Homes for our Community”







Foreword - Investing in Stafford Borough

Housing is central to this vision, playing a vital role in ensuring those living in the Borough have safe, decent, affordable and sustainable homes. Quality housing and a safe and green environment are at the heart of the economic prosperity of the Borough and a thriving community.

The Borough Council has to plan carefully to make the best use of available resources for the benefit of the local community. We wish to foster an environment that encourages and guides others to work in partnership with us for the benefit of our community.

We have recently completed a Housing Needs Survey for the Borough. This, together with recent stock condition surveys for both public and private sector housing, has been used to inform the development of the Housing Strategy. We are confident that this Strategy is based on a sound understanding of Housing and market issues.

We recognise that decent, affordable, sustainable housing:

- contributes to the health and sense of wellbeing of the local community.
- contributes towards the attractiveness of the area which supports inward investment that leads increased community and individual prosperity.
- contribution to the economic wellbeing of the Borough.
- contributes towards a positive build environment.
- Contributes to sustainable communities based on social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

The Borough Council through its Strategic Housing Functions will be promoting its overall aims of economic, social and environmental wellbeing.

The Council is working with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), and this Strategy plays a significant part in that relationship. The work of the local Strategic Partnership has enabled the links between housing and related areas of health, social care, sustainability, renewal and regeneration, community safety, education and employment to be developed.

The Borough Council is working with the Staffordshire County Council, health organisations, voluntary sector and Registered Social Landlords to ensure the strategy produces positive and realised outcomes

There are still many challenges that face us; the application of the decent homes standard to vulnerable households living in the private sector; licensing of houses

in multiple occupation; changes to the private sector renewal; ensure the provision of affordable housing is met; completing our Local Development Framework; all bring new challenges that need to be faced.

We hope that these plans will help others to work with us in our community leadership role for the benefit of our community and form the basis of partnership working to ensure Stafford Borough provides a better place to live, work, play and visit.

Leader of the Council

David Rawlings
Chief Executive

MORE INFORMATION

This document is available in large print – this can be obtained from:

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This document is available in large print, Braille, on tape and in the following languages. Arabic, Hindi, Punjab and Urdu. If you would like a copy in one of these formats, or another language, then contact 01785 619000.

[Arabic]

ولو كنت بحاجة إلى مزيد من المعلومات بخصوص هذا المنشور فيرجى الاتصال بمجلس بلدة ستافورد [Stafford Borough Council] على الرقم 01785 619 000 .

[Hindi]

यदि आपको इस प्रकाशन के बारे में अधिक जानकारी की आवश्यकता हो तो कृपया स्टैफोर्ड बरो परिषद [Stafford Borough Council] से 01785 619 000 पर संपर्क करें।

[Punjabi]

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਦੇ ਬਾਰੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੋਰ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਟੈਫੋਰਡ ਬਾਰੋ ਪਰਿਸ਼ਦ [Stafford Borough Council] ਨੂੰ 01785 619 000 ਉੱਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

[Urdu]

اگر آپ کو اس اشاعت کے بارے میں مزید معلومات کی ضرورت ہو تو براہ کرم اسٹیفورڈ بروکونسل [Stafford Borough Council] سے 01785 619 000 پر رابطہ کریں۔



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CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT FOR THE HOUSING STRATEGY - BOROUGH PROFILE

Executive Summary

In this chapter we describe Stafford Borough to set into context the Strategy and explain how the Borough Council and its Partners will work together to form a coherent approach to the delivery of a balanced housing provision in the Borough over the next 5 years.

We have a housing stock of just over 54,500 dwellings that in terms of price, is not above the national average but has high levels of non-decent homes and affordability issues.

THE BOROUGH AREA

- 1 Stafford Borough is situated in the West Midlands Region, in the county of Staffordshire. It is located between the Black Country authorities to the south and Stoke City Council and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough to the north, to the west are rural parts of Shropshire and to the east rural areas of East Staffordshire and the southern fringes of the Staffordshire Moorlands. It covers some 240 square miles of mixed urban and rural areas of mid-Staffordshire and is geographically the largest district authority in the region. The largest urban area Stafford is the County Town and sub-regional seat of government.
- 2 The majority of the Borough's area is rural in character, with a range of settlements varying from suburban areas on the fringes of the Potteries conurbation, to large freestanding villages and more isolated small settlements. The Borough contains a number of attractive and award winning town and village centres, a range of schools, colleges, various leisure centres, shopping centres and business parks. The main Staffordshire University campus, the District General Hospital and the Psychiatric Hospital, the headquarters of various health agencies, Fire, Police, Probation and Ambulance Services, two prisons, Crown and County Court and the headquarters of the County Council are also located in the Borough. The area is a major manufacturing, distribution and services centre for Staffordshire with 25.3% of the workforce engaged in these trades.

THE POPULATION

- 3 The population of just over 123,000 is split between Stafford (59,000), Stone (15,000) and 35 rural parishes (49,000).
- 4 The local population, in line with national trends, is ageing with the proportion of people over 65 expected to increase over the next ten years. The population has an average age of 40.4 years; which makes it “older than national average” (38.6). Between 1991 and 2004 the percentage of over 65s in the overall resident population of Stafford grew by 2.51%.

HOUSING

- 5 There are approximately 57,000 households in the Borough of which 76% of domestic properties are owner occupied. More people live in detached houses (38.4%) than for England and Wales as a whole (22.8%) and fewer people live in flats (10.1% compared to 19.2%).
- 6 A 2007 condition survey has exposed evidence of deficiencies in the private housing sector (owner and rented). A Housing Needs Survey has demonstrated that there is a high level of demand for affordable housing from people unable to buy. These issues are discussed in detail later in the Strategy.
- 7 The number of households is expected to rise, because more people – both young and old – want to live independently. The district average household size is 2.41, very close to the national average. Average house prices in Stafford Borough are below the national average for England and Wales but are above the regional average. Stafford’s affordability index score is 115.8% of the English and Welsh average (164 out of 376).

PROSPERITY

- 8 Stafford Borough is a thriving and developing industrial and commercial centre.
- 9 Stafford has a relatively low deprivation (DTLR index 234 out of 354 local). However there are within the Borough areas of deprivation, notably in the Highfields, Penside, Common and Coton Wards in Stafford.

EMPLOYMENT

- 10 The Borough has higher levels of employed people and lower levels of unemployed or economically inactive than England as a whole. However, new employment opportunities will be needed to meet demand, widen choice and replace jobs lost as traditional industries continue to decline or re-shape themselves in the face of regional, national and global competition.
- 11 2.6% of residents between the ages of 16 and 74 are unemployed with 0.7% of these being long-term unemployed.
- 12 The Authority is active in promoting and supporting economic development and regeneration. It has recently completed an SRB6 Programme, a Market Town

initiative in the Stone community. It works in partnership with Advantage West Midlands and the Southern Staffordshire Partnership with the aim of diversifying the economy and attracting high wage employment. The economy is generally low waged – 10% below the national average. The Borough does not qualify for most EU or UK public sector investment programmes. The Borough has been highly successful in attracting new employment opportunities into the Borough and has received the 12th and 2nd highest award of Business Growth Incentive Grant for 2005 and 2006 respectively. The Council's Regeneration Service was awarded 'Good with Promising Prospects' at a recent audit.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

- 13 Stafford Borough residents and employees have a high level of awareness of sustainable development and climate change issues. The Council and its partners have supported a wide range of sustainable development activities. The Borough is at the forefront of several renewable energy technology developments. Sustainable tourism is a growing local sector. Several local food initiatives are now well established, involving local farmers and producers and this supports a more sustainable rural economy. The Council is increasingly aware of the need to take action on climate change.

HEALTH

- 14 Health is generally slightly better than average for England as a whole with fewer people describing their health as "not good" or saying they have a long-term illness, health problem or disability which limited daily activities or work. The Council seeks to ensure that its strategies make a proper contribution to improving health locally, especially focussing on priorities such as reducing health inequalities and promoting more active lifestyles.
- 15 17.6% of residents have a limiting long-term illness and 8.3% of residents stated that their general health was "not good". Progress is being made in improving the health of the local community and this work needs to continue.
- 16 Stafford has the lowest rate of teenage pregnancy in Staffordshire.
- 17 Drug related problems are below the national average.

BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

- 18 The proportion of residents describing themselves, as from a white background is 97.4%; above the national average of 91.3%. The largest ethnic minority group is Indian (0.6%). (Mixed race 0.8%, Asian or Asian British 1.0%, Black or Black British 0.5%, Chinese or other 0.2%).

CRIME AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

- 19 Crime levels are generally lower than for England and Wales as a whole, but continuing effort is needed to sustain and improve on this. Fear of crime is a local issue and we work with the Community Safety Partnership to address this.

OUR POLITICAL STRUCTURE

- 20 The Council has 59 Members who are elected every four years. Local elections in May 2007 resulted in a majority Conservative administration with 40 seats out of 59, Labour have 13 seats and Liberal Democrat and Independent 6 seats.
- 21 The Council has appointed a Leader and approved a Cabinet of five portfolios; Resources, Housing, Environment & Community Safety, Planning & Regeneration and Leisure. The portfolios have corresponding Scrutiny Committees.

OUR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

- 22 The Senior Management Structure of the Authority reflects the changing democratic arrangements and the need to provide specific support for the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. The Council's Chief Executive and its two Executive Directors have responsibility for ensuring that the strategic role of the Council is met, that Scrutiny is supported and that cross-cutting issues are effectively addressed. Operationally services are managed by nine Heads of Service. The Chief Executive, Executive Directors and Heads of Service comprise the Corporate Management Group.

OUR OVERARCHING AIMS AND VISION

- 23 In May 2007, following the local elections, the Council has produced a 6-year corporate plan to a new format setting out its revised priorities and areas of focus. The housing priorities established in this Strategy have been developed to ensure an appropriate strategic focus is given to the Council's Priorities.
- 24 The Council has produced this Housing Strategy in order to deliver its strategic aims and vision for housing in the Borough. This Strategy is one component of the Council's corporate strategies. It supports the Homeless Strategy, the Corporate Asset Management Plan, Capital Strategy, Private Sector Renewal Strategy, Affordable Warmth Strategy and the emerging Health Strategy.

STAFFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL PRIORITIES THEME

- Prosperity for all,
 - Cleaner, greener, safer communities
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - Leading and delivering for our community
- 25 Specifically in relation to the strategic housing needs, the Corporate Priorities of the administration for 2008 – 2013 are:
- Provide the relevant planning framework for economic growth
 - Ensure our town centres are attractive, vibrant and distinctive places
 - Promote regeneration in rural areas
 - Promote the take up of benefits and the Council's services
 - Make Stafford a safer place
 - Work towards zero landfill

- Enhance and maintain clean public places
- Promote sustainable development
- Enhance the built environment
- Promote healthy living across the Borough
- Develop leisure opportunities and cultural activities
- Ensure an adequate supply of housing which meets identified needs and the decent homes standard
- Ensure affordable housing
- Assist the voluntary and community sectors to provide services and advice
- Improve the level and quality of engagement with the community
- To work in partnership for the benefit of our community
- Ensure we are seen as a 'customer first' organisation



Brunswick Mews, Stafford

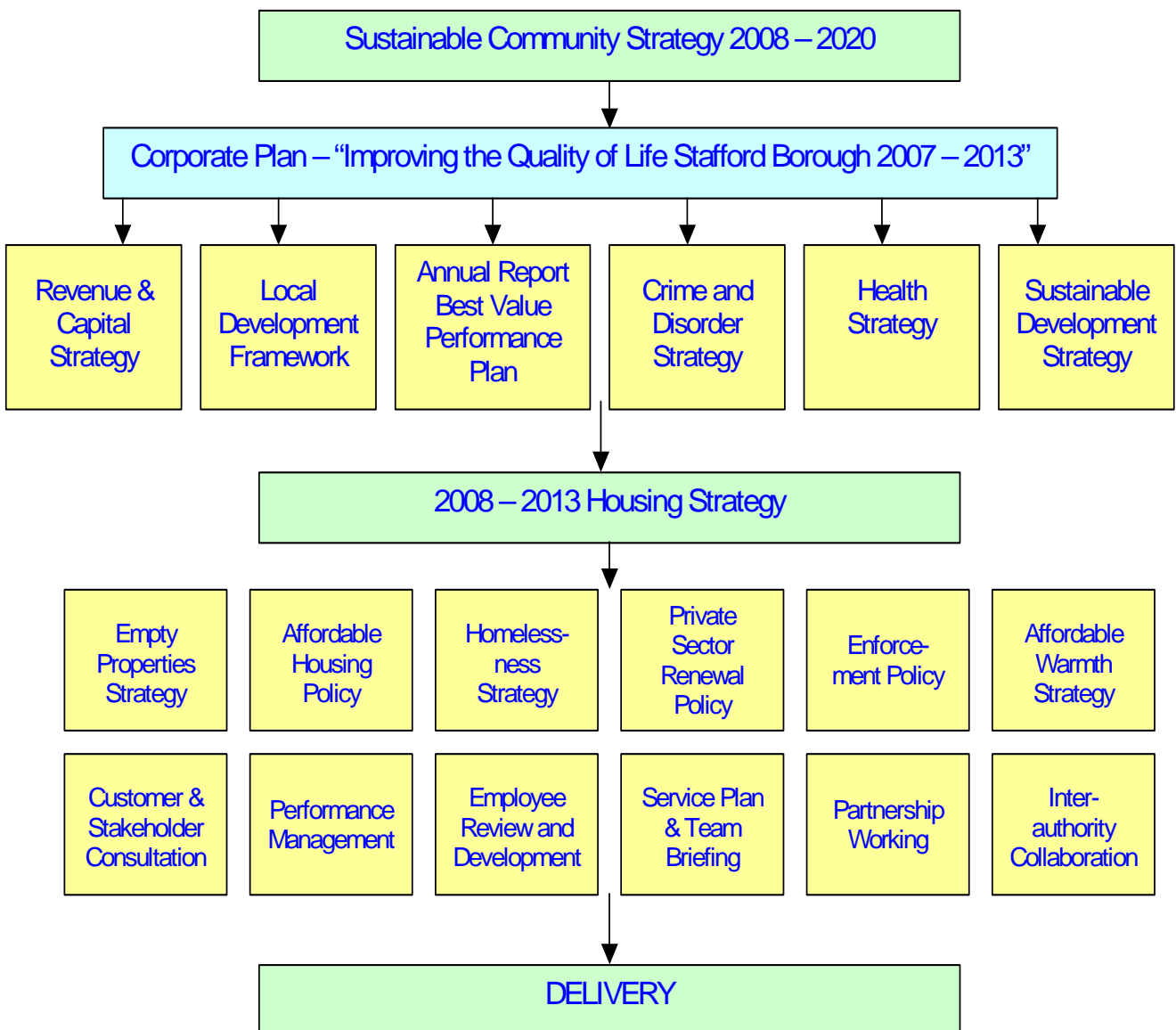
CHAPTER 2: THE CORPORATE CONTEXT

Executive Summary

In agreeing the Housing Strategy for the next five years we recognise the linkage that this Strategy has with other Borough and regional strategies and the need to engage with a variety of partners to ensure satisfactory outcomes to address the local housing need.

The Council's Aims 2008 - 2020 - Our Overarching Aim and Vision

Plan/Strategy Linkages:



ACHIEVING OUR AIMS

- 26 We recognise the increasing need and scope for building public and private partnerships and external funding necessary to deliver investment which is beyond our means. We have introduced a new Financial Strategy. This, in part, was dictated by the housing stock transfer to Stafford and Rural Homes in February 2006 and by the need to ensure that central service costs for the remaining Council organisation reflected its revised scale of operation. However, the opportunity has now been afforded with the demerger of the housing landlord function for greater emphasis to be placed upon the strategic housing function of the Authority. We recognise that the Borough Council is only one of a number of agencies involved in the governance of Stafford Borough. We plan to work proactively with the County Council, Parish Councils and public agencies to secure our objectives and to assist other agencies to achieve theirs. We will also remain alert to the scope for partnership working right across the public, voluntary and private sectors.
- We will take initiatives where we identify opportunity and be receptive to the ideas and proposals put forward by others.
 - We will consult widely on our priorities, carefully evaluate the responses and reaction and make any adjustments prior to submitting a final plan to the Council in 2007.
 - Agree individual projects to achieve the aims of the Council.
 - During the life of this Strategy, there will be an annual update of the Corporate Plan indicating the rollout of the housing-related actions.
 - We will set milestones and targets and produce an Annual Report so that the Council and community can measure progress against each project in the plan, in achieving our strategic housing aims for 2008 – 2013.
- 27 Despite tight financial constraints and limitation on our scope and powers, we believe that with the clear identification of priorities and targets, together with robust management, energy and commitment, we have the principal role of leadership in our community and can make a decisive difference to its well being.

LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

- 28 In February 2007 the Borough Council formally agreed to fully participate in the Local Area Agreement for Staffordshire and any subsequent update. The priorities of this Housing Strategy will contribute to the milestones in the Local Area Agreement.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

- 29 The Stafford Borough Council Community Safety Strategy 2005 - 2008 sets an ambitious programme of priorities. These include:-
- Alcohol and alcohol related violence

- Anti-social behaviour
- Drugs
- Speeding (Road Safety)
- Domestic Violence

30 In relation to anti-social behaviour, the aim is “to reduce Anti-Social Behaviour and Fear of Crime and to reassure people throughout Stafford Borough Area to contribute to an increase in the number of people feeling safe when outside in the area in which they live in the evening by 5% by 2008 (from a baseline of 58.6% feeling safe in 2004) To reduce peoples’ perceptions of Anti-Social Behaviour by a cumulative total of 5% against the baseline identified in the 2004 Crime Audit in wards targeted for activity, so as to reduce the number of incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour reported to Staffordshire Police by 5% by 2008”

BEST VALUE

31 As a result of an Audit Commission review into our Performance Management arrangements it is proposed that the review and monitoring arrangements of the Housing Strategy Action Plan should be consistent with those arrangements for other strategies and action plans throughout the Authority. These are:

- Targets to be included in the Six-Year Corporate Plan (below) of the Council.
- Progress against the Action Plan of this Strategy to be included in the Annual Report at the conclusion of each year.
- Achievement against milestones and progress towards targets to be reported on a quarterly basis to the Corporate Management Group, Executive and the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.
- In the light of any under performance an Action Plan will be required indicating a recovery timetable or amendment of targets in the light of changing circumstances.

STAFFORD BOROUGH SIX-YEAR CORPORATE PLAN

32 The Council has produced a Six-Year Corporate Plan for 2007 - 2013.

33 Priority Three: “Health and Wellbeing”, contained within the Corporate Plan (approved by the Council 11 December 2007) has three objectives which are specific to housing development:

3(a) Promote healthy living across the Borough

3(c): Ensure an adequate supply of housing which meets the identified housing needs and decent homes standard

3(d): Ensure affordable housing.

- 34 Each year during the span of the Plan the projects and initiatives to fulfil these objectives will be reported and will form part of our annual performance management framework.
- 35 At present the Local Area Agreement is being redrafted with an effective date of 1 April 2008. It is anticipated that affordable housing will be included in the targets and outcomes of the final Agreement. This being the case, affordable housing will also be included in the Sustainable Community Strategy for the Borough which will be finalised during 2008. This is consistent with Government Guidance and policy which indicates that the action plan to any Sustainable Community Strategy should contain targets and outcomes of the Local Area Agreement drilled down to district level.

EQUALITY ISSUES

- 36 The Council's Corporate Customer Care Framework was implemented from April 2002. The Council has adopted the Equalities Standard for Local Government and is working towards level 2. There is an ongoing training programme in respect of diversity and customer care issues.

COMMUNITY COHESION

- 37 There is a small ethnic minority population (2.6%) within the Borough and no significant housing or integration issues arise from this section of the community, who are well integrated. However, the Council needs to be aware of the issues, particularly with regard to migrant workers, and to monitor to the extent that any issues that do arise can be dealt with appropriately. The Council is actively engaged with and supports Chase against Crimes of Hate (CACH), which provides a generic reporting and monitoring platform, which reaches out to all sections of the community. A multi-agency forum meets regularly to discuss a range of community cohesion issues.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE

- 38 Stafford Borough Council is a key partner in the Staffordshire Supporting people partnership and as such was involved in the development of the Supporting people 5 year strategy in 2005 and is involved on an ongoing basis in the implementation and further development of the strategy. The aim of the Supporting People partnership is "To ensure good quality housing related Support Services are available for vulnerable people in Staffordshire, to help them to live independently, and be part of the local community".
- 39 Stafford, in common with a number of other urban areas within Staffordshire, has a relatively higher proportion of units of Supporting People support equating to approximately £2.3m invested in services each year.
- 40 Development priorities within Staffordshire for the next 5 years include:
- Ensuring provision of Extra Care accommodation throughout the county.

- Countywide provision of services for young people.
- Provision of a domestic violence refuge in each district.
- Remodelling of accommodation based services for people with a Learning Disability.
- Strategic reviews to look at a range of services provided across Staffordshire linked by a theme e.g. service user group and these will focus on options for restructuring the supported housing market to meet the pattern of need identified.

41 The Supporting people strategy is a living document and will remain responsive to the needs of service users and partners. It will be reviewed on an annual basis based on progress against key targets and standards to inform the ongoing needs of the people of both Stafford Borough and Staffordshire. Stafford Borough Council is a key partner and as such attends both the Supporting People Officers Board and the Commissioning Body in order to ensure the strategic direction of the Borough is represented.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

42 The Council has produced a draft Sustainable Development Action Plan and aims to help to deliver the priorities set down in the National Sustainable Development Strategy. Several areas of sustainable development activity will become increasingly important through national drivers such as a new biodiversity duty and a new Planning Policy Statement on Planning and Climate Change. The Council signed the Staffordshire Declaration on Climate Change in 2006 and has pledged to produce an action plan to combat climate change by December 2008.





CHAPTER 3 – STAFFORD BOROUGH HOUSING PROFILE

Executive Summary

Stafford has a growing population of new forming households and immigration from neighbouring districts.

There is a significant shortage of affordable housing according to our 2004 Housing Needs Survey. Existing affordable supply is significantly lower than total affordable need and an additional 532 units annually would be required to meet all needs.

Average house prices are above the regional average, and are beyond the means of most new forming households.

There are identified and significant levels of non-decent properties occupied by vulnerable families.

The 2007 Stock Condition survey predicts a total of 5,888 vulnerable households, of which 31.7% (1,867) live in non-decent homes.

While the population of the Borough is predicted to rise by 3% annually in the period up to 2011, the number of residents over 65 is set to grow at a significantly higher rate.

The changing age profile of the Borough will affect the range of services required and the level of care and support needed.

The major preference of new households is for owner occupation, but generally nearly three quarters of new households have incomes inadequate to be able to purchase.

HOUSING STOCK PROFILE

- 43 There are over 54,500 dwellings in the borough;

Tenure	%
Owner occupied	75.92
Private rented	8.32
Stafford Borough Council properties	0
RSL	12.97
Other	2.79

POPULATION PROFILE

- 44 The population of Stafford Borough has increased by around 3,330 since the 2001 census, to its 2007 total of just over 123,000. Estimates show the population is growing by 3% annually to about 131,800 by 2029. In addition to this growth, the 2004 Housing Needs Survey estimated the number of new forming households in the Borough as 555 each year.
- 45 There is a 3.7% increase in the numbers of people aged 45 to 64 over the forecast period. (An increase of 2,866 people)
- 46 There is also a significant increase in numbers in the over 65 age group of around 11.4 %. (An increase of 4,200 people)
- 47 The “older” retirement group, those 75 and over grows by 20.5%, nearly 5,400 more people by 2011. There will be around 1,380 more people (15.4% more from 1996) aged over 75 in the Borough by 2006. This group represents almost 10,800 people in the Borough by 2011 who are much more likely to have care and support needs which should now be assessed in detail.

DEPRIVATION INDICATORS

- 48 On the national scale of multiple deprivation, (looking at income; employment; health deprivation and disability; education, skills and training; housing; and geographical access to services) Stafford is ranked at 253, making it one of the least deprived areas in the West Midlands. However Highfields and Penkside two of the Borough wards do have high multiple deprivation rankings.

CURRENT HOUSING IN STAFFORD

- 49 Some 42% of households in Stafford are owner-occupiers with a mortgage, 39% own their homes outright.
- 50 9% of households live in flats, maisonettes or bedsits, 14% are in terraces and 77% are in semi-detached or detached houses or bungalows.
- 51 92% of households say that their accommodation is adequate for their needs. 8% (around 4,320 implied) say that it is inadequate. The largest single issue for those reporting a problem which could be resolved in-situ was that the dwelling needed improvement / repairs (88%). Of those requiring a move, 75% mentioned that the dwelling was too small.
- 52 Single adult households make up 27% of all households in Stafford, lower than the 1991 Census figure for the UK average (31%). Couples constitute 69% of Stafford households compared to 60% for the UK as a whole. The incidence of single parent households (4%) was much lower than the UK average (9%).
- 53 Under-occupation affects approximately 23% of all households in Stafford and over-occupation affects less than 3%.
- 54 71% of tenant households pay less than £60 per week in rent. Of owner-occupiers with a mortgage, some 73% pay less than £300 per month; nearly 4% pay in excess of £750 per month.
- 55 20% of households have incomes below £10,000, which is much lower than for the UK as a whole (33%). Around 57% of households have incomes below the national average household income of £22-23,000. Some 33% of households in Stafford have incomes above £30,000.
- 56 25% or so of households were in receipt of financial support (13,104 implied), of whom 36% (4,667 implied) were in receipt of Housing Benefit.

HOUSING MARKET, HOUSING NEED AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- 57 A detailed analysis of the housing market, housing need and affordable housing can be found in the Stafford Borough Housing Needs Survey 2002 and the 2004 update survey. A new Sub-Regional Housing Market Survey is in the process of development and should be available by 2008. This survey will supply analysis of both the local and sub-regional housing market and housing needs. The outcomes of the Survey will be incorporated into future annual updates of this Strategy.

HOUSING MARKET

- 58 The annual rate of house price inflation reported by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) for the West Midlands Region at 31st October 2007 was 6.7%, below the UK average of 11.3%.

- 59 The average price for all dwellings in the Stafford Borough during the year to September 2007 was £197,050. In the same period, the overall percentage increase in average house prices was 14% (Source: Land Registry).
- 60 The largest volume of sales in the Stafford Borough was for detached houses, selling at an average price of £256,492. Semi-detached houses average £152,197, terraced houses sell at an average price of £138,598 and flats / maisonettes average £114,818. Due to the average price of terraced houses, coupled with the volume of sales (about 20%), these are assessed to be the main access property for first time buyers.
- 61 The increase in the price of terraced houses (26%) and flats / maisonettes (16%) is significantly in excess of wage inflation in the one year period from January 2006. The average income for a first-time buyer in the West Midlands was £29,971 and the average first mortgage was £93,183.
- 62 From our Housing Needs Survey 2004 update, an income of around £19,900 was needed to buy a one bedroom apartment in Stone and a two bedroom apartment in Stone would require an income of £20,700. These are the cheapest locations in the Borough and higher incomes are required in the more rural areas. It is clear that there have been significant increases in entry-level apartment prices since this time, without corresponding wage increases.
- 63 Mortgage interest rates have been at their lowest level for over 45 years and people who cannot enter the market under these circumstances may never be able to do so, short of some collapse in the market or a significant change in their income level. Further house price increases above wage inflation in 2008 would make access to market housing even more difficult to achieve and would impact on households with marginal incomes significantly.
- 64 Similar cost variation applies in the private rented sector across the Stafford Borough. Based on rent at 25% of gross income (equivalent to 30% net income) a one bed flat in the North West area requires £13,200 per annum and £14,400 in Stone, the East and the North areas. A 2-bed flat requires an income of £15,350 in Stafford and Stone and £16,800 in the North and North West areas. To rent a 2-bed terraced house would require an annual income of £14,900 in Stafford.
- 65 Access to market housing has therefore become more difficult for new households than it was in 2004, when our needs survey was carried out, and this has increased the need for subsidised housing - especially in the much higher priced rural areas.

HOUSING NEED

- 66 In our 2004 survey, the total affordable housing need annually is for 1,091 units. The supply of affordable units, both relets in the social housing stock and new units, was 559 units during 2004.
- 67 Even after allowing for this level of supply, there remains an annual affordable housing shortfall of 532 units a year. New affordable units to reduce this shortfall may come from new sites, provision through Section 106 agreements with developers, conversions and market purchase by Registered Social Landlords.

- 68 This level of demand (532 units annually) exceeds the number likely to be delivered, resulting in growing levels of unmet need each year.
- 69 New delivery has averaged 80 units a year, but ranging from 33 units to 126 and is therefore difficult to predict accurately. As the model will be updated annually it is more prudent to deal with new unit delivery in annual review.
- 70 The level of outstanding need of 532 units is nearly seven times the scale of delivery based on the last three years experience. Our significant experience of affordable subsidised housing in mixed developments leads us to recommend that target of new units negotiated should be increased to 40%. This proportion includes both affordable housing for rent and subsidised low cost market housing and targets may range higher or lower than this level on a site-by-site basis.
- 71 Essentially, planning should be providing for balanced communities that acknowledge the need for social compatibility if the problems of housing in the past are not to be repeated. The increases in average house prices of between 51% and 28% for flats and terraced houses over the last year have excluded a large proportion of 'first-time buyers' from the owner occupied market.
- 72 Currently therefore, the Council requires that 30% affordable housing is provided on new sites of 15 units or more, more than would have been the case two years ago when it was a more marginal element of affordable need, even although there is only a limited expressed need from respondents.
- 73 In view of the scale of need and the inability of an adequate number of sites to address it particularly in the period to 2006, subsidised affordable units should be negotiated on all suitable sites. The Council should set a 'target' for each site taking into account existing supply, survey demand and other planning sustainability and economic factors.
- 74 In 2002 we assessed there was a need for unsubsidised small units in the general market to 2006 required to meet the needs of households whose incomes were sufficient to enable them to access the market without any subsidy or discount. The changed relationship between incomes and prices will mean that the number who can access housing in the private sector without subsidy will have reduced significantly.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- 75 The 2004 Housing Needs Survey showed that:
- The total affordable housing need annually in 2004 was 532 units, this has risen from the 2002 assessment of 457.
 - The income needed to buy the average priced terraced property has increased from £26,915 to £34,561 (28.4%) between 2002 - 2004.
 - The income needed to rent an equivalent property is £17,240.

- 93% of new households in the Borough cannot afford to buy a terraced house.
- Private rented costs are beyond the means of 65% of new households in the Borough.
- Since 2004, house prices continue to rise in the Borough by 5% each year.

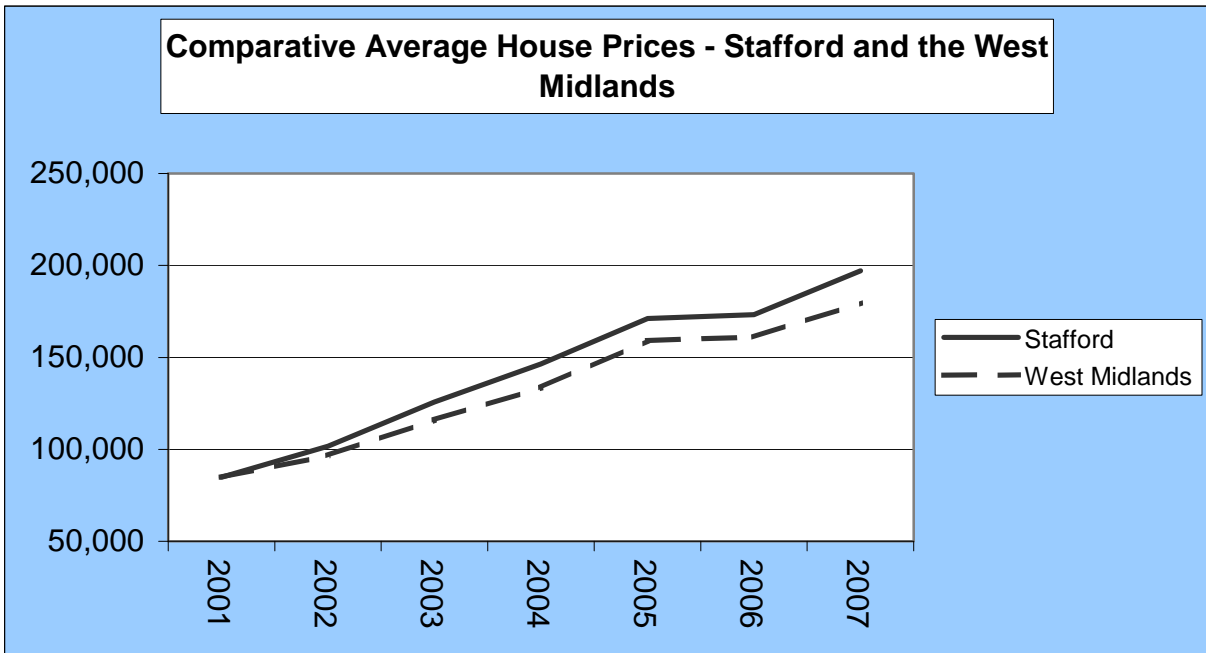
LOCAL CHALLENGE:

- The number of new affordable housing units developed yearly through planning gain does not meet the need.
- The number of hostel places available is insufficient to meet demand.
- The number of affordable rented units is declining annually.

76 Adopting the guidance in the 2005 West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy, 'Delivering a Housing Vision for the West Midlands in the 21st Century' with regard to pathways of choice, sustainability and affordability. The sub-regional challenge is thus to development of a Sub-regional Housing market assessment to respond to the issues and guidance within the regional strategy. This assessment is in progress, as stated previously.

77 Between 2005 and 2006, the number of dwellings in Stafford Borough increased by 577 but only 77 (13%) of these new homes were new affordable homes. Since the introduction of the Right to Buy in 1979, Stafford Borough has lost more than 3,200 social rented homes, or 123 each year, producing a net reduction in the number of affordable homes in the Borough. With average house prices in excess of £190,000 (2007) in the Borough and average West Midlands incomes at £28,201 (2007), the price to earnings ratio is currently at 6.7 times average income for those wishing to buy locally or to move into the Borough from elsewhere in the Region.

78 It is suggested that the continued shortage of the supply of houses, together with a sound economy is continuing to support house price rises. Of further concern is the indication that the population of Stafford Borough continues to grow, putting even greater pressure on the affordable housing infrastructure and increasing the number of 'hidden homeless' families who are unable to rent or buy.



Source: Halifax House Price Index

PAST PERFORMANCE THAT COUNTS.

New homes constructed:

	Total New	Total Affordable	% Affordable
• 2003/4:	538	126	23%
• 2004/5:	533	120 (estimate)	22.5%
• 2005/6:	540	77	14.3%
• 2006/7:	246	54	22%

Lettings to the Social Housing stock:

	LA	RSL	Total
• 2003/4:	645	235	880
• 2004/5:	615	201	816
• 2005/6:	564	350	914
• 2006/7:	0	734	734

HOUSING CONDITION

79 In order to assess the housing standards in the Borough a Private Sector Stock Condition Survey was commissioned in 2007. There are two significant standards against which properties are judged; the decent homes standard and the housing, health and safety hazard rating. The findings of the stock condition survey identify that there are within the Borough a significant number of properties that fail to meet both standards.

- 80 There are an estimated 11,403 non-decent homes accounting for 20.9% of the housing stock. Of these 1,867 dwellings are occupied by vulnerable households.
- 81 The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), succeeds the former fitness standard. The survey identified 2.4% of private sector dwellings have HHSRS category 1 hazards requiring immediate attention.

DECENT HOMES STANDARD IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

- 82 Good quality housing of a decent standard contributes to good health and wellbeing, efficient energy use and improves the street-scene and environmental impact of the buildings. Improving the quality of housing therefore acts as a catalyst for social, economic and environmental improvements.
- 83 A total of 11,403 dwellings (20.9%) were found to fail the Decent Homes Standard (Table 1). The total number of dwellings is less than the sum of the four categories, as a dwelling may be counted under more than one heading.

	Stafford	Stone Town	Rural	Total	Percentage of Area
Cat 1 HHSRS deficiencies	562	127	337	1026	1.9%
Reasonable state of repair	1901	286	3148	5335	9.8%
Reasonably modern facilities	423	95	675	1193	2.2%
Reasonable thermal comfort	2957	413	3261	6631	12.2%
Total dwellings failing one or more criteria	4506	826	6071	11403	20.9%

Table 1. Number of dwellings failing the decent homes standard

- 84 Of principle concern is the number of vulnerable households living in non-decent housing. Table 2 sets out both the number of vulnerable households and the reason the dwelling fails to meet the decent homes standards.

	Stafford	Stone Town	Rural	Total	Percentage of Non-Decent Homes
Cat 1 HHSRS deficiencies	70	32	112	214	1.9%
Reasonable state of repair	282	32	900	1214	10.6%
Reasonably modern facilities	70	0	225	295	2.6%
Reasonable thermal comfort	282	34	450	766	6.7%
Total dwellings failing any of the criteria	423	95	1349	1867	16.4%

Table 2. Number of vulnerable households living in non-decent housing (HSSRS - Housing Health & Safety Rating System)

- 85 The 2007 stock condition survey predicts a total of 5,888 vulnerable households, of which 31.7% (1,867) live in non-decent homes (Table 3).

	Number of households in private sector	Number of vulnerable households in non-decent homes	Number of vulnerable households	Proportion of vulnerable households in non-decent homes
Stafford	24714	423	2887	14.7%
Stone Town	6795	95	191	49.7%
Rural	23048	1349	2810	48%
Total	54557	1867	5888	31.7%

Table 3. Vulnerable households in non-decent homes from survey data

HOUSES ASSESSED AS HAVING HAZARDS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE HOUSING HEALTH AND HAZARD RATING SYSTEM

- 86 Any dwelling found to have a Category 1 hazard requires the Local Authority to take the most appropriate action to deal with the hazard. The survey identified the number of dwellings having Category 1 hazards, shown in table 4 below:

	Stafford	Stone Town	Rural Areas	Overall
Percentage of dwellings having Cat 1 hazards	2,3%	1.4%	2.9%	2.4%
Number of dwellings having Cat 1 hazards	562	95	674	1331

Table 4. Percentages of each area possessing Category 1 hazards

- 87 Almost 70% of the hazards occur in owner occupied households. As shown in Table 5 below:

	Stafford	Stone Town	Rural Areas	%Overall	Percentage of tenure
Owner Occupier	87.5%	100%	50.0%	69.4%	1.9%
Private Rented	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	3.3%
Housing Association	0.0%	0%	16.6%	8.4%	3.3%
Unobtainable	0.0%	0.0%	33.4%	16.9%	100%
Total Dwellings	562	95	674	1331	2.4%
Percentage of area	87.5%	100%	50.0%	69.4%	1.9%

Table 5. Category 1 Hazards by Tenure.

COST OF REMEDIAL ACTION

- 88 Table 6 below shows the cost of remedying the identified deficiencies within the private sector stock. Over £51m is needed for immediate repairs to the dwellings with category 1 hazards alone, and £6.6m is needed to deal with improving the housing for vulnerable households in non - decent homes.

	Stafford	Stone Town	Rural Areas	Total Area
Total Costs for Category 1 dwellings	£1,020,622	£7,779	£50,436,276	£51,464,677
Average cost per dwelling	£1,816	£61	£149,663	£50,161
Total cost Cat 2 dwellings	£1,888,925	£566,839	£589,034	£3,044,798
Average cost Cat 2 dwellings	£3,839	£4,463	£1,748	£3,185
Costs for Non-Decent homes with Vulnerable Families	£1,066,872	£90,954	£5,398,191	£6,556,017

	Stafford	Stone Town	Rural Areas	Total Area
Average cost per dwelling	£2,522	£957	£4,002	£3,512
Total Costs for Non-Decent homes	£6,756,841	£4,696,591	£76,915,195	£88,368,627
Average cost per dwelling	£1,500	£5,686	£12,669	£7,750
Total Costs for unfit dwellings	£53,435	£0	£45,642,137	£53,435
Average cost per dwelling	£379	£0	£135,437	£95,597

Table 6: Costs of repairing dwellings.

- 89 The costs in Table 6 represent the amount for the immediate repairs needed to the dwellings. This may not actually be good value for money, as some elements of the building may need renewal after the repairs have been carried out. It is usually better to renew all elements that need replacement within 10 years at the same time as other substantial works. Table 7 shows the additional cost of carrying out the repairs needed within the next 10 years.

	Stafford	Stone Town	Rural Areas	Total Area
Total Costs for Category 1 dwellings	£2,723,567	£266,402	£59,731,954	£62,721,923
Average cost per Cat 1 dwelling	£4,846	£2,098	£177,246	£61,132
Total Costs for Category 2 dwellings	£0	£2,374,455	£349,098	£2,723,553
Average cost per Cat 2 dwelling	£0	£18,696	£1,036	£2,849
Costs for Non-Decent homes with vulnerable families	£980,503	£1,827,048	£12,052,826	£14,860,377
Average cost per non-decent dwelling	£2,318	£19,232	£8,935	£7,959
Total Costs for Non-Decent homes	£11,527,217	£3,355,532	£135,974,577	£150,857,326
Average cost per dwelling	£2,558	£4,062	£22,397	£13,230
Total Costs for unfit dwellings	£1,889,915	£0	£48,756,333	£50,646,248
Average cost per dwelling	£13,404	£0	£144,678	£105,954

Table 7: Additional costs of repair and renewal for 10 year period

- 90 The Council's Private Sector Renewal Strategy was updated in 2006 to focus primary attention on providing help to the most vulnerable homeowners living in non-decent housing. A mix of minor works grants, unfit property grants and equity release schemes have been developed.
- 91 Support for the programme is provided by Orbit Care and Repair. This Agency provides guidance and advice on the housing options available to clients.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

- 92 The overall energy efficiency of the housing stock is better than the national average with an average Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating of 60.9 (compared to the national average SAP rating of 52.5). The SAP is the Government's recommended system for energy rating of dwellings. The SAP rating of 60.9 is interpreted as being "Good".
- 93 3.1% of the housing stock have a "Poor" Sap rating of 30 or under.
- 94 The survey identifies that 10.3% of homes are at risk of fuel poverty.
- 95 The 2007 Stock Condition Survey concluded that saving in energy consumption of over 30% required by the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA), are technically achievable.
- 96 The Council actively works in partnership with local installers' National Energy Action (NEA), Fuel Utility Companies and warm front (who administer the Government grant scheme) to encourage the take up of energy efficiency measures across all sectors.
- 97 In partnership with the South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust and Orbit Home Improvement Agency, the Council has successfully worked with Npower to introduce the Health Through Warmth Scheme. This is now operating across all the South Staffordshire district Council areas.

HOMES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

- 98 The Council has, over the last 10 years seen a steady increase in the number of disabled facilities grant approvals. The increasing demand for disabled facilities grants is being seen on several fronts. The number of referrals received each year is steadily increasing, which is having an effect on the budgets needed to support the work. It is also affecting the ability to process the increasing number of grants in a reasonable time.
- 99 In January 2008 the County Council's Social Care and Health new arrangements to help disabled people living in their own homes. The Borough Council has been supporting these changes and as a result has developed with the County Council a streamlined approach to processing disabled facilities grants. The new process will place the local Home Improvement Agency at the centre of the referral process; their enhanced role will be as the disabled client's principle contact throughout.

- 100 The Council is not able to approve applications for discretionary disabled facilities grants for financial reasons.
- 101 The Council is works with Stafford and Rural Homes to improve the level of support provided to their tenants. The Association is committed to major improvements in its stock. These will, in the long term, increase the number of suitably adapted homes. To support this process the Association is funding an Occupational Therapist from Social Care and Health.

IMPROVING STANDARDS IN THE RENTED HOUSING MARKET

- 102 High levels of deficiencies identified in the Stock Condition Survey were in the rented sector. There is a large number of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), principally in Stafford Town, estimated to be about 500. There are also a high number of buildings converted into self-contained flats in Stone town (2007 House Condition Survey).
- 103 Stafford has a higher than average number of houses in multiple occupation as a result of the number of students living in the area. Work to ensure standards of safety and amenities is seen as a priority. Following the introduction on compulsory licensing for the larger HMOs 16 licenses have been issued.
- 104 The regulation of standard in this sector is seen as vital. The Council has a number of initiatives running targeted at this sector of the housing market.
- Risk based inspection programme for houses in multiple occupation.
 - Area based inspection programme for rented property.
 - Partner to the landlord accreditation scheme for the North Staffordshire local authorities.
 - Partner to Homestamp Consortium - a partnership with an interest in private sector housing comprising of Local Authorities, the Private Rented Sector, West Midlands Police and West Midlands Fire Service. Their aim being to
 - Encourage the supply of good quality private rented homes
 - To provide and facilitate information and training for landlords
 - To consider and respond to regional and national issues affecting the private rented sector
 - To encourage joint working between all interested parties
 - In October 2007 the Stafford Landlord forum met and agreed to develop a programme of work for the 2008. The Council's support for forum reflects its commitment to the role that the private sector renting will play in developing a vibrant housing market.
 - Match funded incentive grants to encourage investment by landlords in their properties to bring them up to the decent homes standards.

EMPTY PROPERTY WORK

- 105 Stafford has a relatively small number of empty properties in the district. The 2006 survey of the 1,000 properties in the Borough that had been empty for more than 6 months identified 70 that may warrant intervention by the local authority in order to encourage the owners to bring the properties back into use.
- 106 The Council offers a small incentive grant to stimulate the reuse of long-term empty properties. In 2006 two grants were awarded. In total six properties were brought back into use. In each case providing rented accommodation on assured shorthold tenancies that met the decent homes standard.

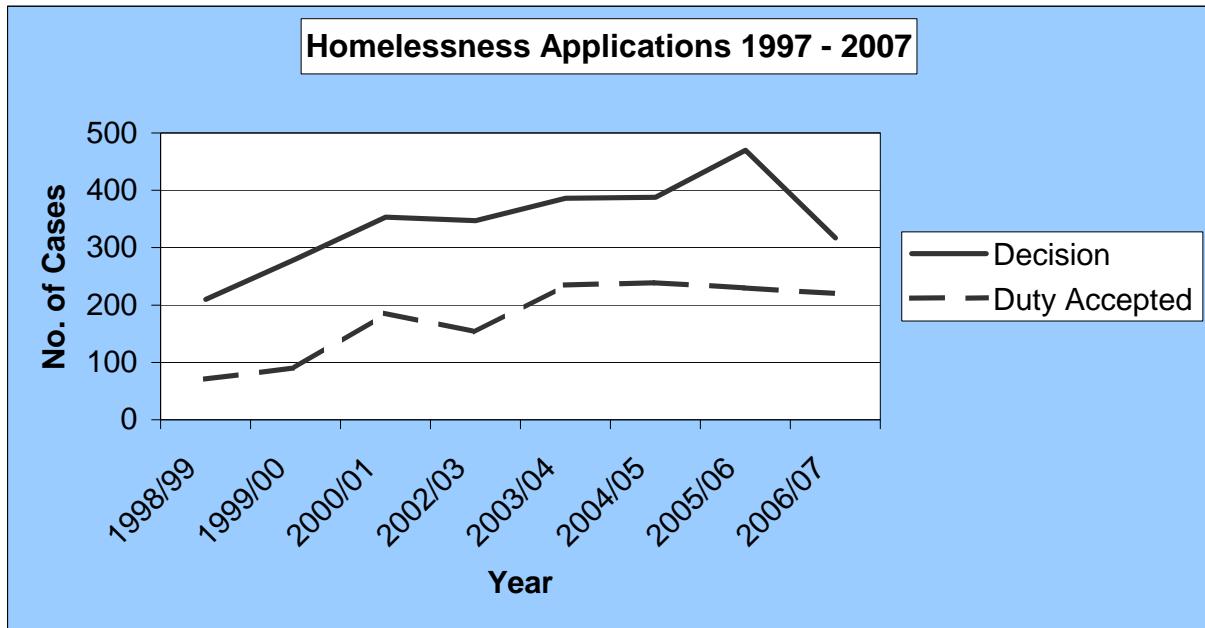
HOMELESSNESS

- 107 Over the past five years, the Borough has seen a growth in the number of approaches to its Homelessness and Advice Service, particularly from young people where parents are unwilling to continue to accommodate them and other relationship breakdowns. Clearly, a proactive approach to addressing the roots of these and other homelessness issues is in everyone's interests. A step change in the provision of Homelessness Services is required, to move towards prevention rather than cure, where this is possible.
- 108 The transfer of the Council's housing stock and the retention of the Housing and Advice functions within the Council has presented the Homelessness and Advice Service with a fresh challenge. A combination of a generally reducing supply of social lets, increasing presentations, the loss of a 33-bed hostel within the Borough (the former Bethany Project), present new challenges to placing clients and move-on. The Council has excellent working arrangements with Stafford and Rural Homes; the Council now has nomination rights to 75% of the new Housing Association's vacancies. These factors have highlighted the need for new insights into the accommodation resource within and without the Borough.
- 109 A further facet of the effect of the loss of the Bethany Hostel is the increasing number of presentations made to the Service by single homeless clients and the consequent increase in difficulty in finding suitable accommodation. Increases in the use of emergency temporary accommodation and the lack of move-on accommodation have put pressure on the Homelessness Service to find alternative solutions.
- 110 Information and reporting systems available to the Homelessness Service have improved since the introduction of the CIVICA APP computer-based information management system. Reporting and monitoring opportunities presented by CIVICA APP need to be fully exploited and integrated into future service provision. Meeting the needs of specific client groups needs to be based on sound information and an understanding of homelessness in both the Borough and the sub-region. The new opportunities afforded to the Homelessness Service will be reflected in the new Homelessness Strategy (April 2008), which partners this document.
- 111 Since the launch of the 2003 Homelessness strategy there have been many guidance documents produced, such as the Regional Homelessness Strategy,

which give both strategic direction and examples of good practice for homeless and prevention services. The future challenge is to integrate such guidance and good practice into future strategy and to move the service into full homelessness prevention operational working practices.

PAST PERFORMANCE THAT COUNTS

112 The table below shows the relationship between homelessness decisions and acceptances between 1997 – 2007.



113 In summary, between April 2004 – March 2007 these were the main causes of homelessness:

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
1 Parents no longer willing to accommodate	45	55	61
2 Other friends relative no longer able to accommodate	20	16	14
3 Non violent breakdown of relationship	25	32	13
4.1 Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner	42	37	30
4.2 Violent breakdown of relationship involving associated person	5	2	7
4.3 Racially motivated violence	2	0	0
4.4 Other forms of violence	11	8	0
5.1 Racially motivated harassment	1	1	0
5.2 Other forms of harassment	4	8	5
6 Mortgage arrears	5	9	8
7.1 Rent arrears on LA dwelling	0	0	0
7.2 Rent arrears on Registered Social Landlord dwelling	1	1	3
7.3 Rent arrears on private sector dwelling	7	2	2
8.1 Loss of rented or tied accommodation due to termination of assured short hold tenancy	33	32	40
8.2 Loss of rented or tied accommodation due to reasons other than termination of assured short hold tenancy	15	16	16
9 Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	0	0	0
10.1 Left prison/ on remand	12	9	4
10.2 Left hospital		12	2
10.3 Left other institution or care		5	12
11.1 Left HM-Forces	20	0	1
11.2 Other reasons		8	2
Total	248	253	220

114 For those homeless applicants who were in priority need of rehousing, these were the reasons for the priority:

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
1 Applicant homeless because of an emergency	1	1	0
2 Household includes dependant children	153	129	116
3 Household includes pregnant women but no other dependant children	17	33	26
4 Applicant is aged 16/17	5	5	12
5 Applicant formally in care and aged 18 to 20	0	4	2
6 Applicant vulnerable due to old age	9	6	1
7 Applicant vulnerable due to physical disability	6	16	7
8 Applicant vulnerable due to mental illness or disability	23	28	33
9.1 Drug dependency	4	6	1
9.2 Alcohol dependency	4	4	5
9.3 Former asylum seeker	0	0	0
9.4 Other dependency	6	4	1
10 Applicant is vulnerable as a result of having been in care	1	0	2
11 Applicant is vulnerable as a result of having served in Armed Forces	0	0	0
12 Applicant is vulnerable as a result of having been in custody/ on remand	3	7	4
13 Applicant has fled their home because of violence / threat of violence	16	10	10
Total	248	253	220



CHAPTER 4 – NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL INFLUENCES

Executive Summary

Integrating the principles contained within National and Regional strategy, policy and guidance.

Ensuring that we are represented at Regional and sub-regional level, to influence and inform the decision-making process.

Ensuring that we form successful partnerships with the Housing Corporation and Registered Social Landlords.

Ensuring that we are engaged with the local planning process and the Local Development Framework process and the proposed Local Area Agreement for Staffordshire.

Engaging with local and regional partners to support urban and rural regeneration.

Developing strong links with Stafford and Rural Homes, other Registered Social Landlords and the private sector to work towards meeting the needs of local residents.

NATIONAL INFLUENCES AND POLICY

- 115 In this chapter we place the Housing Strategy into a National and Regional setting; identify the influences on it and to show how this, in turn, has influenced our overarching policies.
- 116 This Housing Strategy is fully in line with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) policies contained within 'Quality and Choice: A decent home for all' (2000). 'Quality and Choice' set out the framework to enable local authorities to take a strong strategic role in housing, meet needs across all types of housing and integrate housing policy with wider social, economic and environmental policies. The document set out four specific measures aimed at enhancing this strategic role, promoted cross-sector working and provided the framework for later housing related policies:
- Increasing local authorities' resources and giving them greater flexibility to adopt policies that meet the needs of their communities across all types of housing;

- Providing guidance to enable local authorities to carry out proper needs assessments and stock condition surveys to underpin their housing strategies;
- Developing closer partnership working between the Housing Corporation and local authorities, in particular ensuring that investment in new social housing meets local priorities; and
- Encouraging collaboration between neighbouring local authorities to ensure that problems are tackled effectively and not shifted from place to place, including the problems of low demand housing.

117 The publication of 'Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future' by the DCLG in February 2003 built on 'Quality and Choice' and set out the Government's national priorities for housing. These key national priorities were carried forward into a 'Sustainable Communities in the West Midlands' document. The key strategic housing challenges for Local Authorities set out in the document are to;

- Tackle poor housing conditions in the social sector and private sectors
- Ensure effective action towards meeting the Decent Homes Standard in the social housing
- Improve more non-decent homes in the private sector, especially those occupied by vulnerable households
- Support urban and rural renaissance by arresting the shift of population from the conurbations to the rest of the region
- Tackle the problems of low demand
- Ensure optimal development of Brownfield sites in urban areas
- Ensure provision of sufficient affordable homes in areas of shortage
- Tackle the factors that cause homelessness

THE WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2005

118 'Delivering a housing vision for the West Midlands in the 21st Century: Pathways of Choice', introduced in June 2005 built on this National foundation and was further reinforced by a robust evidence base of regional research. The strategy's aims are to:

- Create diverse, inclusive and balanced communities
- Assist the delivery of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) policies for urban and rural renaissance
- Address the variety of housing needs across a range of specific sectors
- Work towards the success of the two Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders
- Influence future developments in new housing developments to facilitate and enhance the economic development in the region

- To achieve Government's Decent Homes standards by addressing a variety of needs across a range of specific housing circumstances, such as municipal, social sectors and those vulnerable in the private sector
- Encourage development that will contribute to the improvement of the quality of the environment as a whole
- Achieve a balance of housing tenure to ensure provision of social and other affordable housing where required

119 The Regional Strategy identified four Housing Market Areas (HMAs), built on an analysis of the way the Regional housing market operates. Stafford Borough is identified as being within the North HMA, which groups together Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire Moorlands, East Staffordshire, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stafford Councils. The key sub-regional issues identified within the North HMA are:

North HMA - currently:

- Limited mix of smaller and older properties affected by economic decline
- Regeneration and renewal through RENEW Pathfinder
- Substantial Decent Homes problem
- Significant differences in affordability

North HMA – future priorities:

- Focus on delivering Pathfinder
- Introduce social rented strategies/low cost home ownership in higher priced areas
- Encourage private sector renewal in low income markets
- Implement the West Midlands Homelessness Strategy

120 The Regional Housing Strategy sets out the basis for investment priorities from the single regional housing 'pot'. The Regional Strategy also sets the framework for partnership working to achieve regional aims and the North HMA has developed, through partnership, a Regional Action Plan based on sub-regional research which identifies sub-regional priorities. The North HMA Strategic Partnership meets regularly to progress the aims of the Action Plan.

121 For Stafford Borough Council, the aims within this strategy reflect the priorities set out in the National, Regional and Sub-Regional policies. These include:

- Working in partnership with our sub-regional partners to achieve these aims.
- Assisting in the implementation of the Regional Homelessness Strategy and working towards aligning our Homelessness Strategy with the Regional and local homelessness priorities.
- Developing local but sub-regionally aligned affordable housing priorities, particularly in rural areas.

- Achieving the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.
- The Local Context.

- 122 The Borough Council also considers the following local priorities:
- 123 The Council's Housing Needs Survey 2004 showed that the Borough has a severe affordability gap. The survey concluded that there was a need for 532 affordable units annually and that this was nearly seven times the current rate of delivery of new affordable homes.
- 124 Homeless applications in the Borough have continued to rise. Whist acceptances remain steady; the number gives cause for concern and presents the Borough with an increasing problem with temporary accommodation. The Regional Homelessness Strategy points towards prevention as a way forward and the Borough fully endorses this as a course of action.
- 125 The Council has adopted the new powers contained in the Housing Act 2004 and introduced new enforcement arrangements for residential dwellings. It has also introduced licensing for larger multiply occupied rented properties in the Borough.
- 126 E-Government will also transform the way in which local services are delivered, in addition providing opportunities to reduce isolation (particularly in rural areas) and to increase inclusion. The Council has set up a call centre providing multiple access channels to Council services.
- 127 We are members of the regional HECA network. We work closely with the major energy utilities and local installers to support the delivery of our Affordable Warmth Strategy. A copy of the Affordable Warmth Strategy is available on the Council's web site.
- 128 Through membership of these partnerships and through active participation we ensure that key local issues are considered at regional and sub-regional level and that local housing priorities are aligned with and support regional and sub-regional policy. We are also in a position to maximise the opportunities to influence the ways in which resources are allocated under the new arrangements.
- 129 We recognise that the demography of the Borough changes over time, both in people's expectations of their living places and the formation of families. This strategy encourages developers and Social Housing Providers to meet a wide range of identified needs in all areas and styles, exploring the full range of opportunities to deliver affordable housing to all household types and sizes. However, in the development of new affordable housing, the Borough is committed to neighbourhoods, sustainability and improving opportunities for choice in housing.
- 130 Joint working to address the issues of retirement migration, including specific work on homelessness and the older community to be taken forward in our partner document: the Homelessness Strategy.

- 131 Delivering a whole range of housing products to suit the needs of the elderly, from all cultural traditions and levels of care, by engaging both the public and private sectors to engage with our strategic priorities.
- 132 Encouraging the development of financial solutions to release capital and to encourage maintenance and to make best use of the existing housing resource.
- 133 Working with the County Council (Supporting People), Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), developers and the Housing Corporation, to address the housing needs of vulnerable people.
- 134 Pathways of future housing choice including, regeneration, access to work and the needs of low income workers, sustainable housing based on commuting distances which support the Pathfinder areas and High Technology Corridors:
- Accounting for the changing nature of work places, including working from home.
 - Giving priority access to local people on low incomes.
- 135 Although the West Midlands has a very diverse housing market, Stafford shares many policy priorities with our partner Authorities, including:
- Addressing poor housing conditions in private and public sectors,
 - Enabling the provision of affordable housing to meet a significant shortfall in both rural and urban areas.
- 136 The Regional Strategy has allocated funds for vulnerable people in the private sector. Our strategy sets out the context so that we are best placed to obtain these and other resources, where need can be shown.
- 137 The Regional Strategy proposes measures to help local authorities meet the Decent Homes Standard, where retention of their housing stock is the preferred option. The vote by Council tenants in favour of transfer of the stock to Stafford and Rural Homes has precluded us from obtaining such public funding. However, Stafford Borough Council continues to work with Social landlords to ensure that the Decent Homes Standard is met by 2010.
- 138 We recognise the need to act regionally, yet at the same time ensuring that our key local issues are addressed. It is clear that the majority of the Single Regional Pot will be allocated to the West Midland's areas of greatest housing need, that is, the issues of low demand, supporting people, and affordable housing. Funding options may be rebalanced to favour those authorities not transferring their stock and affect future Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme (ADP) funding. The Council's strategy recognises the importance of working jointly with Registered Social Landlords, the Housing Corporation and other partners to maximise the development opportunities in the Borough, particularly in rural areas, but set against the wider Regional context - particularly with regard to supporting urban regeneration in the Major Urban Areas (MUA) by the use of planning measures.

THE LOCAL PLANNING CONTEXT

- 139 The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Phase 2 revision, was submitted to the Secretary of State in January 2008, proposing 10,300 new houses in Stafford Borough 2006-2026, of which approximately 7,000 are proposed at the town of Stafford. Stafford is also identified as a “Settlement of Significant Development” in the submitted revised RSS. However, there remains the possibility that these housing requirements may increase.
- 140 In preparing the Local Development Framework, which will replace the existing Local Plan, the Council will have regard to the Regional Spatial Strategy and national policy included in Planning Policy Statements, the Housing Green Paper and emerging good practice on the provision of affordable housing. In 2008 the Council intends to publish its preferred option for the Local Development Framework Core Strategy and this will include policies on both affordable and rural exceptions housing.
- 141 At present the Council seeks affordable housing provision on sites in urban and rural areas with fifteen or more dwellings. There is currently an expectation that 30% of such dwellings would be affordable, with 25% being social rented and 5% being intermediate housing such as shared ownership. Stafford Borough Council is considering a revision of these percentages and also considering a threshold of fewer than 15 dwellings on sites in rural areas.
- 142 There is a new supplement to PPS1 on Planning and Climate Change – published in December 2007. This sets out how planning should contribute to reducing emissions and stabilising climate change whilst taking into account any unavoidable consequences. Applicants for planning permission should now consider how well their proposals for development contribute to the Government’s ambition of a low-carbon economy and how well they adapt to the expected effects of climate change.

STOCK TRANSFER ISSUES AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

- 143 As has been previously stated, in March 2005, the Borough’s tenants voted in favour of stock transfer to a new registered Social Landlord (RSL), Stafford and Rural Homes. This was completed, successfully, in February 2006.
- 144 Since the transfer of the Council’s housing stock to Stafford and Rural Homes, a combined strategic housing service has been created in Environmental and Health Services. Our future will include:
- Re-using, repairing and improving empty and deficient properties.
 - Reducing the need to build on Greenfield sites, but exploring the possibility of local exception sites.
 - Enabling the provision of affordable housing in rural areas where there is little scope for new build.
 - Preventing decline.

- Ensure decent homes for vulnerable households.
- Stimulating private investment.
- Promoting independent living by ensuring that disabled home owners receive appropriate levels of advice and support to enable them to continue living in their own home.
- Promoting independent living for other groups in our community
- Re-examining the current S106 affordable housing policy, jointly with planners.
- Examining the options available through joint and partnership working.
- Work with private landlords to ensure quality of choice in the rented sector.
- Working with Parish Councils and other stakeholder groups.
- Working with partners to identify the potential for future affordable development, both urban and rural.
- Exploring the potential of the private sector for affordable housing.
- Remodelling the Homelessness and Advice Service.

145 The local priorities outlined later in this strategy have been specifically chosen by the need to encapsulate both the National and Regional priorities and to provide a framework for working on the local issues identified above. These priorities are:

- Improving the physical condition of the housing stock across all tenures
- Preventing Homelessness
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing in the Borough.
- Promoting independent living for disabled people
- Partnership working

146 The Borough will continue to work with partners to support the Pathfinder in Housing Market Renewal in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, although the issues and subsequent priorities of affordability are recognised as different for each organisation. The Pathfinder does not, therefore figure significantly in this Strategy.



CHAPTER 5 – PARTNERSHIP

Executive Summary

The Council recognises the importance of working with a wide range of Regional, Sub-Regional and local partners and stakeholders to identify housing issues and priorities, and to plan responses to these. The Council will continue to develop partnerships to underpin and provide added value to the delivery of the housing work.

WORKING WITH REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORDS AND THE HOUSING CORPORATION

147 The Council works closely with all RSLs that have an active presence in the Borough. This work involves:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consults RSLs and the Housing Corporation at a strategic and enabling level, to develop housing and support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership with Orbit Housing Association to delivering the Home Improvement Agency.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular RSL liaison meeting is held to discuss operational issues and development/funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with the RSLs in moving towards a Borough-wide Choice Based Lettings system.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly review the effectiveness of established Nomination Agreements and the Housing Benefit Service Level Agreement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with Supporting People to meet Housing Strategy objectives to facilitate supported housing for a range of special needs groups.

WORKING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

148 The Council has a range of well-developed and established links with a range of partners from the private sector. The importance of these links is recognised by the Council as being vital to the development of a vibrant housing sector. This work involves:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landlord Forum to promote standards and good practice • Working with landlords to develop a range of homeless prevention measures and good practice among private landlords and letting agents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Staffordshire Landlord Accreditation Scheme. The Council has joined with Stoke on Trent City Council, Newcastle BC and Staffordshire Moorlands DC to develop a common accreditation scheme for the whole of North Staffordshire.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme has promoted standards in the private sector and providing a valuable source of rented housing to those who would otherwise have difficulties accessing private rented property. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private Developers benefit from clear guidance on the Council's Planning Policies in relation to affordable housing, through an information pack and the opportunity to informally discuss affordable housing requirements on proposed developments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homestamp is a partnership consortium with an interest in private sector housing comprising of Local Authorities, the Private Rented Sector, West Midlands Police and West Midlands Fire Service. Our aim is to: • Encourage the supply of good quality private rented homes • To provide and facilitate information and training for landlords • To consider and respond to regional and national issues affecting the private rented sector • To encourage joint working between all interested parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable Warmth Strategy - the strategy was developed in 2003 with a major input from all interested Stakeholders including fuel utilities, charity, voluntary and public sectors. This input has been achieved through development workshops and direct consultation. The Strategy is currently being reviewed and updated.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Health Through Warmth project is an npower initiative; the delivery of the scheme locally has been developed in consultation with the partners and set up to meet the local need, providing a valuable role in identifying hard to reach vulnerable residences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The empty property strategy is currently being developed to facilitate the bringing back into use of long-term empty properties.

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY – AND LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

- 149 The Council ensures that housing issues are considered by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the Local Delivery Board (The Local Area Agreement (LAA)). The Local Delivery Board ensures delivery of the LAA at Borough level by:
- In respect of the LSP consideration of housing issues is undertaken at the annual State of the Borough Debate each March and inclusion of housing matters can be found in the draft Sustainable Community Strategy to be approved in 2008.
 - In respect of the LAA, housing matters are included in the Children and Young People’s Block, together with the Healthier Communities and Older People’s Block of the LAA. Consideration of these issues is primarily undertaken at the LAA Health and Social Care Thematic Board
- 150 In addition, the Council have held a series of annual Area Forums across the Borough at which housing issues could be raised and responded to. In respect of Area Forums, their effectiveness is being considered at present as by a Task & Finish Group from Resources Scrutiny Committee.
- 151 The Council actively supports the work of the voluntary sector in the delivery of support services. This work has given rise to “cross cutting” themes on both housing and health being addressed. This involves:

WORKING WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary sector partners provide a range of housing and support services, and the Council values their experience and expertise in planning and delivering services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is an active member of the Home Improvement Agency and is represented on the governing Board.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age Concern and Citizens Advice Bureau in providing advice on a range of issues including housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary sector partners play an active part in the Local Strategic Partnership.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership with Rethink (formerly the National Schizophrenia Fellowship) and Stafford Hospital and Community Friends has led to improvements in housing and support services available to mental health service users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Councils works closely with Stafford District Voluntary Services, the sector’s umbrella organisation and is delivering key strategic functions such as responses to Domestic Violence and a Sanctuary Scheme.

WORKING WITH THE PUBLIC SECTOR

- 152 The Council are aware of the benefits of good inter-authority working, which can bring added quality to its work.
- 153 Officers actively participate in working with the Disabilities Service of the County Council to develop improved service delivery of adaptations to disabled clients' homes. This work follows the principals of the ODPM guidance on "Delivering Adaptations" and enables countywide policies to be developed.
- 154 Officers actively participate in the CIEH^{1[1]} Staffordshire chief officers housing technical group, this gives an opportunity for the sharing of information and good practices and the development of working groups to look at specific areas, for example, regulatory reform.
- 155 A working group comprising multi-disciplined officers and the Fire Authority produced the Staffordshire fire safety guide for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). This document provides a detailed officer tool to support good practice and has been adopted both inter-authority and inter-disciplinary and is regularly reviewed and updated. The working group have adopted the Homestamp guide, as practical guidance to share and inform private landlords.
- 156 The North Staffordshire Landlord Accreditation Scheme is a partnership of the north Staffordshire local authorities and the North Staffordshire landlords association to promote good practice in the private rented sector.
- 157 The Staffordshire University accommodation register benefits from the close inter-authority working between this Council and our colleagues at Stoke City Council, enabling the common agreement on standards.
- 158 A list of current partnerships is at **APPENDIX 1**.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP TO DEVELOP OUR ROLE IN PLACE-SHAPING

- 159 The Government White Paper, 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' (October 2006) says that District Councils have an essential role in Place-Shaping. As such, Stafford Borough Council has a lead role in delivering many of the services essential to the strategic priorities within the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the Local Area Agreement (LAA). The white paper sets out how District Councils can work together with partners to develop new approaches to community issues. Housing is a key strategic function within these partnerships.
- 160 As outlined above, this Housing Strategy recognises the part it can play in building cohesive and sustainable communities by supporting the aims of the White Paper

^{1[1]} Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

and providing a robust part of the local strategic leadership framework documentation.

- 161 The White Paper says: “Local authorities’ work in producing housing strategies has been a lever for economic and social change in many areas, reflecting a shift towards ensuring local housing markets meet local demands, rather than a narrower focus on directly providing social housing. This strategic housing role is at the heart of achieving the social, economic and environmental objectives that shape a community and create a sense of place.” It is important, therefore, for this strategy to support the housing-related needs of the community and the needs of partners within the community in order to assist in facilitating such social, economic and environmental objectives. This strategy supports the integration required to be able to face the challenges facing the local, sub-regional and regional housing market challenges that cut across administrative and specialist boundaries.
- 162 In the future, the Borough will work with partners, at Regional, sub-regional and at local level to deliver the aims of this strategy. This work is set out under Strategic Priority No. 5: Partnership Working



CHAPTER 6 – STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Executive Summary

In this chapter we describe the five Strategic Priorities for Stafford Borough Council:

- Improve the physical condition of the housing stock across all tenures
- Preventing homelessness
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing
- Promoting independent living
- Partnership working

Each Priority is discussed against the options available and a conclusion is drawn as to which is the best option to address each priority. The resources available to meet each priority are listed.

- 163 This chapter details the five issues that the Council consider to be the core strategic priorities for the Borough. This work builds on the information in earlier chapters of the Housing Strategy. The five core strategic priorities are:
- Improve the physical condition of the housing stock across all tenures
 - Preventing homelessness
 - Increasing the supply of affordable housing
 - Promoting independent living
 - Partnership working
- 164 In each of the five sections we set out, in brief, the challenge facing the Council; the available options; the process followed to assess the options; the outcome and the resources identified to address the issues.
- 165 In the action plan that accompanies this Housing Strategy, we indicate how the strategy addresses each of the 5 Strategic Priorities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO. 1: IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF THE HOUSING STOCK ACROSS ALL TENURES

LOCAL CHALLENGE

- 166 In Chapter 3 we identified those housing issues that are significant in the Borough when compared with national housing condition.
- (i) 20.9% of the Borough's private sector stock does not meet the Decent Homes Standard.
 - (ii) 2.4% of properties were identified as dwellings which were seriously defective; having category 1 hazards as defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
 - (iii) 5,508 vulnerable households live in non-decent housing.
 - (iv) 10.3% of households suffer from fuel poverty.
 - (v) An estimated 11,400 homes fail to meet one or more of the decent homes standard criteria, of which 1867 homes are occupied by vulnerable households.
 - (vi) Defective homes are found throughout the Borough but the highest level, occurs in the rural areas.
 - (vii) Public capital expenditure on private sector housing renewal, through the Council Renewal Policy of around £300,000 a year will not address the problems of deficiencies.
 - (viii) The "older" retirement group, those 75 and over, is predicted to increase by 20.5%, nearly 5,400 more people by 2011. There was around 1,380 more people (15.4% more from 1996) aged over 75 in the Borough in 2006. This group represents almost 10,800 people in the Borough by 2011 who are much more likely to have care and support needs which should now be taken into account.
 - (ix) There are over 1,000 long-term empty properties. However, a recent survey indicates that the number of empty properties that might require some intervention from the Council is nearer to 70.

Past performance that counts (2006/2007)		
	Number	Value
Minor Works Housing Assistance	73	£188,000
Unfit Property Assistance	3	£32,000
Empty Property Grant	2	£10,000
Landlord Grant	3	£5,500
Support for home improvement agency		£33,000
Inspections of Houses in Multiple Occupation	230	

Handy person services customers	500
HIAS clients	450

THE OPTIONS

OPTION 1 – REMAIN AS WE ARE

- 167 If left to its own devices the housing market would not address many of the most difficult housing standards in the Borough. Were the Council to follow this course the most vulnerable households, living in the worst housing conditions would be left without support. It would also be a dereliction of the duties imposed on the local authority and as such is not a viable option.

OPTION 2 – PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL PROGRAMMES

- 168 The level of funding needed to resolve all the housing problems in the Borough is beyond the means of the local authority. A Housing Renewal Policy that balances advice, guidance and has an element of financial support for the most vulnerable households would allow the housing market to address many of the standards while at the same time providing a safety net for those in most need.

OPTION 3 – ENFORCEMENT ACTION

- 169 The approach of addressing all non-decent or unfit housing in the Borough by way of enforcement action alone would force change that might not otherwise happen for owner occupied properties. But it would not provide any support for the most vulnerable owner-occupiers.
- 170 In relation to privately rented property the local authorities role in helping to support and guide private landlords enforcement may be appropriate as a part of a range of measures designed to encourage the improvement of standards. It would also offer support to some of the most vulnerable households living in non-decent/unfit rented accommodation.
- 171 Another area where enforcement action may be appropriate will be in addressing the problems presented by empty properties. Enforcement by the local authority may be appropriate as a part of a range of measures designed to encourage the owners of empty property to bring them back into use.

REVIEW OF OPTIONS

- 172 The following mechanisms were used to review our options:-

Dialogue with	Landlord Forum North Staffordshire University Registration scheme
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<p>Responding to our residents</p>	<p>Stafford District Voluntary Advice Service Local Strategic Partnership (in particular the Social Task Group) Staffordshire Home Improvement Agency Alliance Orbit Care and Repair Stafford Borough Council – Development Control</p> <p>Area Forum Analysis of service requests</p>
<p>Political Consideration</p>	<p>Housing demerger allowed review of the Housing Strategic Function Priorities of the Council – to deliver a unified housing service that meets the needs of the local community and helps to underpin the economic stability of the Borough. Priorities of the LSP – revised Sustainable Communities Plan 2006 – 2020 priorities on decent homes, affordable housing, secure accessible and energy efficient accommodation Emerging Local Area Agreements</p>

WHICH OPTION?

- 173 Thinking about these options; Option 1 does not address the basis needs of a viable housing market and does not meet the Council’s statutory obligations. Further, it will ultimately have a detrimental effect on the most vulnerable households, living in the worst housing conditions, who would be left without support. We consider that Improvements in the physical condition of the housing stock will be achieved only through a combination of Option 2 and Option 3.

OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW

- 174 The outcomes of the review are as follows:
- We will undertake a review of the Private Sector Renewal Policy in the light of the results of the Stock Condition Survey, with a view to increasing the effectiveness of investment in this sector.
 - We will continue to support the Home Improvement Agency Service in its work.
 - We will continue to support and promote energy efficiency grants, to work with the energy utilities, other agencies and the voluntary sector to promote energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty.
 - We will continue to reduce the number of defective dwellings in the private sector through a programme of advice and, where necessary because of hardship, grant assistance.
 - We will continue to target advice and resources to vulnerable households living in non-decent housing.
 - We will work with the stock transfer organisation, Stafford and Rural Homes and other Registered Social Landlords to improve and rehabilitate private

sector stock, for example through rural and urban rehabilitation programmes. We will investigate the use of access to trained tradesmen at affordable prices.

- We will work with the Home Improvement Agency Service to introduce equity release schemes to support private sector renewal.
- We will continue to work with private landlords, the University, the County Council (particularly with regard to social care) and neighbouring local authorities to improve standards in rented housing.
- We will undertake a review of the Empty Property Strategy with a view to returning such empty properties into the market, or as affordable housing.
- We will investigate a range of alternative initiatives including the possibility of access to additional funding sources (such as fuel companies), customer self-help schemes, financial inclusion and partnership working to address housing-related health and safety issues.

Capital Resources Available

	2007/08
PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL BUDGET	300,000
HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY SUPPORT GRANT	33,000
	333,000



STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO. 2: PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

THE OPTIONS

OPTION 1 – STAYING THE SAME

- 175 The number of people applying to the Council as homeless is increasing each year. The work of the Homelessness Team would remain focussed on homeless investigations and carry out some work on homeless prevention.

OPTION 2 – PARTIAL CHANGE

- 176 A partial change to the Council's homelessness and advice service would mean keeping the way in which we do things essentially the same, but adding some homelessness prevention services and other elements of good practice where we can.

OPTION 3 – CHANGING TO A HOMELESS PREVENTION SERVICE

- 177 Under this option the work of the Homelessness Team would have specialist prevention officers, focus more on the prevention of homelessness and take homeless applications only from those people whose homelessness could not be prevented.

REVIEW OF OPTIONS

- 178 The following mechanisms were used to review our options:

Dialogue with	North Staffordshire Housing Alliance Local Strategic Partnership (in particular the Social Task Group) North Housing Market Area Core Strategy Group Regional Homelessness Strategy Action Plan Implementation Team Staffordshire Social Services Staffordshire Supporting People Voluntary and Community organisations DCLG Homelessness Unit Regional Housing Board
Responding to our residents	Feedback from North Housing Market Area Homelessness Stakeholder Conference and Forum
Political Consideration	Housing Stock Transfer allowed review of the Housing Strategic Function Priorities of the Council – at present are to support Strategic Priority P2 'Choice within the Housing Market' and 'quality of life' and P10 'advice and assistance to improve quality of life' by funding ways to prevent homelessness. Priorities of the LSP – revised Sustainable Communities Plan 2006 – 2020 priorities on decent homes and affordable housing.

WHICH OPTION?

- 179 The most likely outcome under **Option 1** would be that the number of homeless applications will continue to rise and as a consequence, the number of people the Council have to place in temporary accommodation would also rise. The Council may not have the resources to deal with this and so an option in which prevention is a key part would be our favoured choice.
- 180 Considering **Option 2**; this would be an improvement to our service, but the Homelessness and Advice Team would still be reacting to problems instead of anticipating and preventing homelessness. Our service would not be taking full advantage of all the advice and resources now available for homelessness prevention.
- 181 Changing our service to a proactive preventative service (**Option 3**) is, we think, the best way to use our resources wisely to reduce homelessness in the Borough. This would also help to reduce the use of temporary accommodation and have the best outcomes for service users. Since our last Homelessness Strategy was adopted, the Council have new guidance on best practice in homelessness from National and Regional Government. The Housing Corporation has also produced a key guidance document for Housing Associations. The prevention of homelessness is a theme that runs through all these documents. If the Council is to use its resources in the most cost-effective way, it needs to reorganise the service to adopt these important strategic changes. In addition, the Local Area Agreement has the reduction of homelessness as a main priority. The Council needs to make sure our service works together with these strategic themes. The Council will also need to work in partnership with other providers of housing so that it has a homelessness service whose aim is preventing of homelessness and making best use of the Borough's existing accommodation.

OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW OF OPTIONS

- 182 The outcomes of the review are as follows:
- We will undertake a complete review of operational working practices within the Homelessness and Advice Team with a view to establishing a housing options and prevention service
 - We will undertake research into Homelessness to identify specific client groups and their needs towards a comprehensively informed review of homelessness within the Borough and the local housing market area.
 - We will publish a new Homelessness Strategy in 2008.
 - We have established a homeless prevention fund and will explore a range of tools for homeless prevention in 2008.
 - We will continue to work with planners, developers, the Housing Corporation and Housing Providers to increase the supply of new affordable housing in the Borough.

- We will work jointly with partners in the social and private housing sectors, voluntary and statutory sector to establish comprehensive homeless prevention and housing options service.
- We will work with stakeholders; RSLs and the County Council to replace the Stafford Homelessness Hostel with a new build 32-bed Supported Housing Project, which has secured £1.8m Housing Corporation funding.

Capital Resources Available – 2006/07

HOMELESS PREVENTION FUND	14,000
RESEARCH INTO HOMELESSNESS	20,000
DCLG HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT	35,000
	69,000



STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO. 3: INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

THE OPTIONS

OPTION 1 – KEEPING THE SERVICE THE SAME AND RELY ON THE PLANNING PROCESS TO INCREASE THE NUMBERS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSES

- 183 Under this option, the Council would continue with its current policy that requires (through Planning Law) house builders to provide affordable housing on all sites where 15 or more dwellings are to be built (this is called the ‘threshold’). Where sites do provide 15 or more dwellings, the Council asks for 30% of all houses built on the development to be affordable.

OPTION 2 – MAKE OUR PLANNING POLICY ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING TOUGHER

- 184 This option would need the Council to be firm in its approach to achieving more affordable housing through Planning Laws. Like option 1, the planning system can help in developing new affordable homes, but a tougher approach such as lowering the threshold for rural sites to 5 houses or more, or increasing the proportion of affordable houses on sites that qualify to 40% would increase the numbers of new affordable homes built each year.

OPTION 3 - WORK WITH PRIVATE HOUSING DEVELOPERS, PRIVATE LANDLORDS, HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS AND THE HOUSING CORPORATION TO DEVELOP A RANGE OF DIFFERENT HOUSING OPTIONS, RENTED AND NEW, TO MEET LOCAL NEEDS

- 185 Under this option the Council would look at all the ways in which affordable homes can be developed (including those mentioned under option 2). The Council would work in partnership with house builders, private landlords and social landlords to meet the differing housing needs of current and future families in the Borough. The Council would also look at alternative ways of increasing the numbers of affordable homes, including homes in the private rented sector. The Council could also look at how affordable homes can be funded – and where such funding could come from. The Council could look at where affordable homes are built in urban areas. In rural areas, local parish needs surveys would add more detail to our Borough Housing Needs Survey.

REVIEW OF OPTIONS

- 186 The following mechanisms were used to review our options:

Dialogue with	North Housing Market Area Core Strategy Group Staffordshire Supporting People Voluntary and Community organisations Regional Assembly and Government Office of the West Midlands RSLs and Developers The Housing Corporation
Responding to our residents	Consultation within the Housing Needs Survey Data from housing applications and Housing Register.
Political Consideration	Priorities of the Council – at present are to support Strategic Priority P2 ‘Choice within the Housing Market’ and ‘quality of life’. Priorities of the LSP – revised Sustainable Communities Plan 2006 – 2020 priorities on decent homes and affordable housing.

WHICH OPTION?

- 187 Thinking about these options, we have considered **Option 1** and it seems clear that the Council needs to do something to increase the number of affordable houses in the Borough, so staying the same would not be our choice of option. Adopting this option would result in an increase in the number of families unable to afford the home of their choice, since the number of families in need of housing is rising faster than the number being built.
- 188 Considering **Option 2**; lowering the level at which the Council requires developers to provide affordable housing would increase the number built each year, but this option would still not provide enough new housing by itself.
- 189 If it is clear that the Council cannot rely on one method alone to make sure that we have enough affordable housing in the Borough, **Option 3** would give the Council the flexibility to choose the best answer to the problem, whether newly built or rented. To do this successfully we will need the most up to date information about the housing market in the Borough and the areas around the Borough to better understand what housing need there is.

OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW OF OPTIONS:

- 190 The outcomes of the review are as follows:
- The review of options established that it was not likely that the numbers of affordable housing required to meet need was to be met through planning gain alone (option 2), although in response to PPS3, the threshold beyond which affordable housing must be provided under S106 has been reduced from 24 units to 14.
 - It was clear that an investigation into alternative sources of affordable homes is required to address the levels of need identified in the Borough. The options to be investigated include:
 - Shared Ownership
 - Equity Release Schemes
 - Bringing empty homes back into use, including flats above shops

- Working with private sector landlords and developers
- Working with RSLs
- Working with landowners
- The Borough will produce revised robust Supplementary Planning Guidance on affordable Housing.
- Investigate a scheme to jointly fund a Rural Housing Enabler.
- Work with Sub-regional partners to produce a Sub-Regional Housing Market Assessment.
- Jointly produce a Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment.
- Work with RSL partners, developers and the Housing Corporation to facilitate affordable housing schemes with and without public funds.
- Work with Mercian Housing to maximise the Homebuyer scheme and develop a housing register for affordable housing applicants.

Capital Resources Available – 2006/07

GYPSY AND TRAVELLERS ACCOMMODATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT	16,000
HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT	5,400
SUPPORTED HOUSING PROJECT (FROM CAPITAL CONTRIBUTIONS IN LIEU OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING)	300,000
	321,400

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO. 4: PROMOTING INDEPENDENT LIVING

LOCAL CHALLENGE

- 191 The Local Challenges to promoting independent living are as follows:
- (i) Facing a continuing increase in demand for disabled facilities adaptations;
 - (ii) Increasing number of elderly residents living in the Borough who will need additional support to help them continue to live their own homes.

PAST PERFORMANCE THAT COUNTS (2006 - 2007)

- Disabled Facilities Grants - £650,000 awards made.
- HIAS supported 300 elderly/disabled clients
- Handy person helped 500 elderly disabled clients

THE OPTIONS

OPTION 1 - A SCHEME TO MANAGE THE RATE OF APPLICATIONS FOR GRANTS THAT ARE APPROVED

- 192 Staffordshire Social Services applies a priority rating to all applications for disabled facilities grants based on their need and urgency. The Council could use a similar scheme to decide the order in which grants are approved. If such a scheme were introduced, this would limit grant approvals only to the highest priority: Priority 1. This means that Priority 2 and 3 cases would not be given grants, but advice on housing options only. Such a scheme would allow Priority 2 & 3 cases to be reviewed and made a higher priority after 12 and 24 months.

OPTION 2 – SET FUTURE PAYMENT DATES FOR APPROVED DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

- 193 The 1996 Act gives local authorities the right to approve a mandatory disabled facilities grant application on the basis that the grant will not be paid before a date in the future, set when the grant is approved. By doing this, the Council may delay the payment of grants by up to twelve months from the date the grant application was received. Doing this would allow the applicant to get the work done and be sure that the grant would be paid at a certain date. However, this assumes that applicants are in a position to pay for the work and are then able to wait for the grant to be paid.

OPTION 3 - APPROVE A CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

- 194 Mandatory disabled facilities grants are part funded by Central Government and part funded by the Council. The amount of money available to fund disabled facilities grants is set each year in line with this allocation. However, a programme

based only on the grant allocation from Central Government will not meet the future demand.

	Specified Capital Grant (SCG) 2007/8 (a)	SBC capital commitment 2007/8 (b)	Total DFG aid 2007/8 (a) + (b)
Policy based on SCG level only	340,000	226,667	566,667

REVIEW OF OPTIONS

195 The following mechanisms were used to review our options:

Dialogue with	Staffordshire Home Improvement Alliance Orbit Care and Repair Staffordshire County Council Stafford and Rural Homes Stafford Locality Board Staffordshire Conference on delivery of disabled facilities grants Staffordshire Liaison Group (Consisting of Housing Authorities, Disability Services, Home Improvement Agencies) Local Liaison Group
Responding to our residents	Customer Satisfaction Surveys
Political Consideration	Priorities of the Council

WHICH OPTION?

- 196 Thinking about these options, we believe that **Option 1** does not reflect the mandatory nature of the disabled facilities grant. Even so, it would be reasonable to make sure resources are directed at those applicants who have the most urgent needs, or are at the greatest risk.
- 197 As we said, the demand for grants continues to increase. In order to meet our statutory duty and at the same time maintain control over our budgets there may be occasions when it will be necessary to put back the approval of disabled facilities grants (**Option 2**).
- 198 We can see that the level of funding necessary to support the increasing demand for disabled facilities grants needs to increase to match demand over the next 5 years (**Option 3**). The amount of money available to the Council in the form of Central Government Grant is unlikely to be enough to support this future demand for disabled facilities grant. To help solve this problem the Council must work

closer with Social Services to make sure those referred to us are those cases in most urgent need and then we will also need to identify new funding sources to support our work.

OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW OF OPTIONS

199 The outcomes of the review are as follows:

- We will continue to provide advice and support to disabled home owners, and families with disabled children.
- Establish a clear link to the Supporting People 5 year Strategy.
- Establish a clear link to the Homelessness Strategy.
- We will review the processes associated with disabled facilities grant assistance and will work in partnership with the County Council and other key players to ensure the client receives a seamless service.

Capital Resources Available

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
MANDATORY DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS BUDGET	566,667	480,000	480,000	480,000

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO. 5: PARTNERSHIP WORKING

LOCAL CHALLENGE

200 In Chapter 5 we explored the need to work in partnership with other Local Authorities and organisations, private, voluntary and statutory, to achieve our aims. Encouraged by both central and regional government, this way of working to maximise our resources and skills was always a priority, but now formal structures exist to support this. Working in this way presents us with some challenges and opportunities for partnership work on the following initiatives:

- To align services with national, regional and sub-regional strategic direction
- Engage with the new PCT within South Staffordshire
- Engage with housing providers, both the social and private sector
- Deliver a balanced housing market across the Borough and the sub-region, taking into account economic, community, infrastructure and environmental considerations.
- Recognise the shift in responsibility, post transfer of the housing stock, in the role of the local authority and the Stafford Borough Strategic Housing function
- To align services and resources with the LAA.

PAST PERFORMANCE THAT COUNTS (2006)

- Transfer of the Council Housing Stock
- Orbit Home Improvement Agency
- Replacement facility for the former Hostel at Newport Road, Stafford
- Rent Assistance Scheme
- Enhanced housing options for disabled residents through the provision of disabled facilities grants.
- North Staffordshire Landlord Accreditation Service
- Health Through Warmth Project
- Promote the installation of home energy efficiency measures
- Section 106 agreement works
- Development of the exceptions site at Cold Meece
- Sanctuary Scheme

THE OPTIONS

OPTION 1 – STAY AS WE ARE

201 Under this option the Council would continue to work as we do. We already work in partnership with other local authorities, for instance, the North Housing Market Area

Strategic Partnership (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council and Stafford Borough Council), to produce important strategic documents such as the Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment and the North Housing Market Area Housing Market Assessment. The Council already works with partners on the various Local Area Agreement Boards.

OPTION 2 – WORK WITH ALL PARTNERS

- 202 There are many groups and partnerships working in the Borough area and the sub-region that have a housing or housing-related subject. Option 2 would suggest that the Council try to engage with as many of these groups as possible and network as widely as possible to further the Council’s housing aims.

OPTION 3 – PARTNERSHIP WORKING WHERE THE NEED IS JUSTIFIED

- 203 The third option in this section is to develop and support partnerships where we can show that there will be a material difference to the housing market in the Borough, where this is based on sound evidence, research and where there are resources to do it.

REVIEW OF OPTIONS

- 204 The following mechanisms were used to review our options:

Dialogue with	North Housing Market Area Strategy Group Staffordshire Supporting People Voluntary and Community organisations Regional Assembly RSLs The Housing Corporation
Political Consideration	Priorities of the Council – at present are to support Strategic Priority P2 ‘Choice within the Housing Market’ and ‘quality of life’. Priorities of the Council – to deliver a unified housing service that meets the needs of the local community and helps to underpin the economic stability of the Borough. Priorities of the LSP – revised Sustainable Communities Plan 2006 – 2020 priorities on decent homes and affordable housing.

WHICH OPTION?

- 205 **Option 1:** Although the Authority works with partners successfully at the moment, the risk of staying as we are when Regional and National Housing Policy is changing include:
- The chance of failing to balance the housing market whilst meeting the needs of existing and new residents – the result would be that those in housing need would lose out on a range of opportunities.

- Failure to be strategically placed so as to take advantage of new funding opportunities.
- A lessening of our reputation as an Authority that responds to change.
- Failure to meet the partnership working opportunities arising from the Local Area Agreement

206 **Option 2:** Whilst working with all strategic partners is what we hope for, the risk to the Authority is that there are insufficient resources and skills available to develop partnerships across every sector of need – the Council can't do everything. The purpose of this strategy is to make sure our key strategic responsibilities are identified and to use our resources on these wisely.

207 **Option 3:** This option allows us to focus on our main priorities and to be practical about what the Council can realistically do with the time and resources available to us. This is our favoured option.

OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW OF OPTIONS

208 The outcomes of the review of options are as follows:

- The Borough Council will engage with partnerships where there is a proven and tangible need that will make a material difference to the housing outcomes in the Borough.
- The Borough will investigate alternatives to attending meetings, to maximise use of staffing resources, such as:
 - Technological alternatives such as expanded use of the internet.
 - Use representatives from other partner agencies as surrogate attendees.
 - Sharing contributions with partners.
 - An officer from South Staffordshire PCT embedded for part of the week at the Borough Council to facilitate joint working.
 - Ensure staff resources are made available to meet the needs of the Housing Strategy

Capital Resources Available – 2007/08

JOINT GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT	16,200
NORTH HOUSING MARKET AREA HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT	5,400
	21,600



CHAPTER 7 – RESOURCES

Executive Summary

In this chapter we outline the resources available to the Council for the Housing Function:

- Resource allocation
- Day-to-day services expenditure – revenue spending
- Grants to the private sector – capital spending

The chapter looks at past and future spending and outlines resources allocated to Affordable Housing and Grants.

OVERVIEW

- 209 Stafford transferred its housing stock in February 2006 to a Registered Social Landlord, Stafford & Rural Homes, to provide a better standard of social housing to the tenants and to benefit from the improved level of investment that the new landlord could bring to the social housing stock. The transfer has inevitably led to significant changes to the focus of the Council's strategy as regards its housing function, switching from being a provider of social housing to focusing on its strategic housing responsibilities. This has led to a change in funding the residual housing function to ensure that there are sufficient resources for the Council to fulfil its statutory housing obligations.
- 210 This section on resources will look at:
- Resource allocation
 - Day-to-day services expenditure – revenue spending
 - Grants to the private sector – capital spending

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

- 211 Stafford Borough Council is developing a corporate planning system that will be linking resources to services to outcomes. Each year the Council agrees and publishes its Annual Plan which aims to provide the community with an overview of what it will be doing to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of the Borough area.
- 212 Over the last few years the Council has identified resources within the Budget to support the priorities. Each year when bids are considered for inclusion in the

capital or revenue budget for the forthcoming year they are scored against the corporation priorities.

- 213 The Council's Financial Strategy is updated annually on a four year rolling forecast. It forms the basis for budget setting and links available resources to the priorities, objectives and service requirements. It includes a projection of known service changes over the four-year period and expected cost pressures in the period. The increased cost of the housing service following the transfer of the housing stock was identified and an amount of £50,000 was included in service cost projections from 2006/07 onwards.
- 214 To ensure that Stafford is directing its resources to meet its corporate priorities and service requirements, a process has been put in place through which all new spending proposals for the budget need to be assessed using a business case approach. Each proposal will need to be justified against Council priorities and ranked to inform decision making both at officer and Member level. The business case approach ensures we give consideration to the following areas:
- contribution to strategic objectives;
 - compliance with corporate best value, procurement and consultation strategies;
 - performance management arrangements;
 - opportunities for working with partners;
 - legal issues;
 - financial issues – including ability to attract external funding; and
 - risk assessment and risk management arrangements.

BUDGET MONITORING AND CONTROLS

- 215 We continually monitor progress against the financial strategy and the impact that external factors might have on future finances. The Council has implemented a new Financial Management System (FMS), Consilium's TASK, which provides financial information, commitment accounting and more flexible financial reporting. Using the new system, financial monitoring is carried out monthly at officer level with summarised reports for each Head of Service backed up by more detailed analysis down to each cost centre. Financial reporting for Cabinet members is carried out monthly for each portfolio on a summarised basis. In addition there is further reporting to members with monitoring reports produced at least quarterly for each of the five portfolios to the relevant Scrutiny Committee with explanations of significant variances. Opportunities are taken as they arise to fine-tune the matching of resources to priorities. For example, subject to financial regulations, virement enables budgets to be moved from one area of activity to another during the course of a financial year. In addition, as part of the financial year-end procedures budgets which are unused can be carried forward and used on similar or other areas of activity. Each year a review is undertaken to ensure that any previously carried forward budgets are used for the purpose agreed. Any carried forward budgets that are not required can be re-allocated to other spending priorities.
- 216 The resources delivered by the corporate service and financial planning processes for housing are allocated using the principles outlined above. The transfer of the

housing stock and the Council becoming a strategic housing enabler has led to a re-prioritisation of the housing function within the Council's services.

DAY-TO-DAY SERVICE EXPENDITURE – REVENUE SPENDING

PAST SPENDING

- 217 Stafford Borough Council's revenue spending on housing services falls into two broad categories – housing revenue account as landlord and general fund housing services. General fund housing services covers housing benefit payments (Stafford pays over £16 million a year) and homelessness, housing advice, housing strategy and private sector renewal. Net revenue spending on these services (excluding capital charges) is shown below:

Year	Stafford's spending on...£000		
	Homelessness, housing advice, housing strategy & private sector housing renewal	Housing benefits services	All day to day spending on housing services
Actual spend in:			
2002/03	238	743	981
2003/04	230	874	1,104
2004/05	199	978	1,177
2005/06	297	1,029	1,326
2006/07	296	1,092	1,388
Planned spend in:			
2007/08	386	1,105	1,491
2008/09	396	1,132	1,528
2009/10	406	1,161	1,567
2010/11	416	1,190	1,606

- 218 Spending on homelessness, housing advice, housing strategy and private sector housing renewal have increased by about 27% following housing stock transfer as the Council puts more investment into the housing function to fulfil its enhanced strategic role. An additional officer has been appointed on the strategy side and the homelessness function has been re-structured.
- 219 Spending on housing benefit administration has gradually been increasing and the figures in the table above are projected forward on the current level of spend. The Council has been investing in recent years in new technology in several services one of which is the benefits service. The new benefits system together with the introduction of document management technology in 2005 will lead to greater efficiencies and improved quality to the service provided and it is anticipated that the cost of the service will stabilise as the efficiencies feed through into the operation of the service.
- 220 The Council works in partnership with Orbit Housing Association to provide a Care and Repair service and the Council contributes £35,000 each year to support the work of the agency.

FUTURE SPENDING

- 221 As already mentioned, an additional £50,000 was invested in the service so that it could meet its new strategic obligations. The existing housing budget and the additional funding will increase each year for pay growth and inflation. Budget bids have been put forward and their success in finding approval will depend on the level of available resources and how closely they fit with corporate priorities. During 2006/7, the following bids were put forward for consideration and approved:
- Stock condition survey
 - Homelessness review
 - Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment
 - Homelessness prevention fund
 - Choice-Based Lettings
- 222 The homelessness prevention fund is aimed at finding innovative ways of preventing people from becoming homeless by using a proactive approach such as a rent assistance scheme, one-off payments to landlords to prevent eviction etc. Approaches such as this should not only reduce individuals and families from facing homelessness but should also save money by reducing the need for bed & breakfast temporary accommodation.
- 223 The Council will continue to support the Care and Repair service run by Orbit Housing Association and has included within its medium term financial strategy the current level of support, approximately £35,000.

GRANTS TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR – CAPITAL SPENDING

PAST SPENDING

SOCIAL HOUSING – THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

224 Until February 2006 a principal focus was the improvement of the Council’s housing stock and its investment priorities were:

- meeting Decent Homes Standard for all Council dwellings by 2010;
- delivering the Maintenance and Improvement Plan
- targeted improvements to sheltered housing schemes identified by partnership group; and
- structural repair of non-traditional properties.

225 In 2003 a capital investment gap of £12 million was identified. Following an option appraisal by consultants, a stock transfer was identified as the best way forward resulting in the successful transfer of the housing stock to Stafford & Rural Homes in February 2006.

HOUSING GRANTS – THE PRIVATE SECTOR

226 The national policy for mandatory and discretionary grants and associated funding has seen continual change in recent years making it difficult to develop, implement & monitor a strategy at a local level. Central government support for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and discretionary grants has seen significant change in the last few years. The table below sets out the spend on grants in Stafford Borough in recent years:

Year	Stafford’s spending on...£000			
	Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)		Private sector renewal grants	All Housing Grants
	Council housing	Private sector		
Actual spend in:				
2003/04	313	234	457	1,004
2004/05	477	349	198	1,024
2005/06	273	330	62	665
2006/07		480	400	880

Planned spend in:				
2007/08		567	400	880
2008/09		480	400	880
2009/10		480	400	880
2010/11		480	400	880

- 227 Until 2002 the Council received a 60% subsidy on spending on DFGs in the private sector. In 2002 the ODPM cash limited the grant and in future they will pay grant up to a maximum ceiling at a rate of 60%. For 2006/07 the maximum grant that will be paid is £289,000. Any spend above that figure must be met in full by the Council. In 2006/07 the grant will support a gross expenditure on DFGs of £482,000 leaving the Council to fund 40% of the expenditure which is £193,000. The Council is putting additional resources into DFGs in 2006/07, a total of £560,000, over and above the guideline amount and therefore will be using capital resources of £271,000 to meet the anticipated demand. In recent years a high demand for DFGs was expected and to meet that demand £950,000 was included in the 2005/06 budget. However that spend did not materialise and the budget for 2006/07 has been set at a level based on recent experience of demand.
- 228 The Council has for many years maintained a programme of housing renewal in the private sector that includes providing grants to homeowners. In October 2006 the Council adopted a new Private Sector Renewal Strategy that developed a range of different grants designed to support private sector renewal. The main forms of support are:
- 229 Minor repairs grants – for the costs of minor repairs including weather proofing dwellings, repairing severely defective services and facilitation of hospital discharges. The grant is targeted at homeowners, who are in receipt of a means tested benefit and are not able to fund the work themselves.
- 230 Equity release grants – a scheme to enable homeowners to repair and improve their homes by obtaining finance from using their home ownership equity.
- 231 Unfit property grants – targeted at properties that require more substantial amounts of work. The grant is targeted at homeowners, who are in receipt of a means tested benefit and are not able to fund the work themselves.
- 232 Landlord grants – incentive grants designed encourage landlords to bring property up to the decent homes standard.
- 233 Empty property grant – incentive grant to encourage reuse of empty property and increase number of affordable rented houses.
- 234 Spending on private sector renewal grants has fallen from the 2003/04 level as the Council diverted its capital resources into spending on disabled facilities grants. The

Council has approved a revised Housing Renewal Policy for the period 2006 to 2011 and is using the new cash capital grant to support the policy. As part of the stock transfer all external debt was repaid and the new cash grant - Decent Homes private sector stock occupied by vulnerable people - fits in better with the overall financial strategy than the previous system of Supported Capital Expenditure (SCE). The new Housing Renewal Policy encourages homeowners to maintain and invest in their own property and financial assistance is targeted at the most vulnerable housing in the worst housing conditions. The different forms of assistance for 2006/07 has been agreed to meet the new policy.

FUTURE SPENDING

- 235 Following the transfer of the housing stock to Stafford & Rural Homes the remaining revenue and capital resources on the former Housing Revenue Account remained with the Council. These resources are now available for investment in the Council's priorities.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- 236 The Council set up a Task and Finish Review Working Group to look at affordable housing. This has identified a number of possible funding sources for affordable housing:
- Section 106 monies
 - Housing Corporation Grants
 - Capital funding
 - Land
- 237 Following the abolition of Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG), the most direct way that the Council can influence funding for affordable housing is through the use of negotiated Section 106 agreements. This will be the main source for the funding of affordable housing.
- 238 Working with Registered Social Landlords and developers, the Council may facilitate schemes part-funded by grants from the Housing Corporation. Such schemes are particularly relevant to affordable housing in rural areas and supported housing developments. The Council is investigating the possibility of part funding a Rural Housing Enabler, in partnership with social housing providers, to enable working at Parish level.
- 239 The financing of affordable housing through the use of the Council's capital resources will be difficult due to the competing demands on those limited resources and the large sums on money required to fund affordable housing schemes. Any possible use from this source will have to compete with other non-housing schemes and rank as a priority for the Council.

- 240 At the time of the transfer of its housing stock to Stafford and Rural Homes, the Council retained a quantity of sites that can be used for affordable housing development.

HOUSING GRANTS – DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

- 241 The Council is committed to providing disabled facilities grants. It has set a budget for 2007/08 at a level of £567,000.
- 242 The Council will continue to support spend on disabled facilities grants and is including within its medium term capital programme expenditure set at the level which will maximise Specified Capital Grant, currently cash limited at £303,000 supporting a gross expenditure of £505,000. Spending will be reviewed regularly on the basis of demand received for disabled facilities grants.

HOUSING ASSISTANCE – PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL

- 243 The Council's policy is to target assistance for the private sector to the vulnerable. The cash grant has been allocated to target this particular group. This level of funding will be maintained in the capital programme and will be reviewed annually when we receive notification from the Government Office of the West Midlands of the grant award for the forthcoming year. If the grant is reduced from the current level the Council will consider putting additional capital resources to bridge the funding gap. However any additional spend will compete against other schemes in the capital programme and will be scored against the Council's priorities.





CHAPTER 8 - MONITORING, UPDATING AND CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Executive Summary

In this chapter we outline the systems in place to monitor the progress of the Housing Strategy including:

- Service user consultation
- Information to Members, staff, service users and stakeholders
- Feedback and updating the Strategy and Action Plan
- Performance management

Using these mechanisms to ensure that the Housing Strategy remains a relevant and up-to-date document which achieves its aims.

MONITORING AND MEASURING THE HOUSING STRATEGY

- 244 This strategy will be reviewed and updated regularly in order to ensure the targets and projects are delivered in a way which is relevant to need and that the Action Plan reflects this. The Action Plan gives a detailed list of SMART targets. These are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related. Monitoring and measuring will be done in a number of ways outlined below:

BUILDING ON STRATEGIC AND CORPORATE LINKS

- 245 The Housing Strategy Action Plan links into a wider range of partner strategies and targets, including the borough Council's Corporate Plan, The Sustainable Community Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and the Local Area Agreement. These documents are reviewed and outcomes included in the annual report at the end of each financial year. The outcomes achieved from the Housing Strategy will figure in this annual report.

INVOLVING AND CONSULTING

- 246 Progress on Action Plan will be reported to the Community Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis. Information on the Strategy outcomes will be shared across a

range of relevant partnerships, for example the Staffordshire Housing Policy Officers Group and Staffordshire Supported Housing Network.

- 247 Regular features on housing issues will continue to be reported to residents through press releases, information journals and council publications.
- 248 The Housing Strategy will be available to Members, staff and the public through the Council's Web Site. Minutes from regular Action Plan Update meetings will also be available electronically. Updates and action-plans will be circulated electronically and return feedback and comments will be welcomed. Stakeholder consultation collected through focus groups will inform future updates.

HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK

- 249 The Council will use existing forums such as the quarterly Housing Association Liaison Group, Housing Management Team Meetings and quarterly Action Plan Meetings to consult with partners who meet regularly in order to ensure the Strategy document is quality monitored and progressed robustly. The focus groups will assist in a review of the Strategy and will examine our performance against the targets set in the action plan, taking into account any relevant national and regional policy changes as well as local factors. The outcome of these focus groups will be reported to the Community Scrutiny Committee and will be used to update the strategy for the following year. Where appropriate, the newly formed Borough Council's Resident's Panel will be used for consultation purposes.

MANAGING PERFORMANCE

- 250 Each Service of the Council submits quarterly performance data, which shows progress against performance indicators from individual service plans. Performance will be compared to other organisations through the Staffordshire Housing Policy Officers Group Value For Money annual benchmarking exercise. This data feeds into the Best Value Performance Indicators, which are published in the Corporate Plan and subsequent annual report.
- 251 Performance Improvement Plans are being developed for the Housing Service, so as to ensure that the Housing Strategy operational objectives and priorities are fully aligned with the Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry. These objectives and priorities can then be linked to Employee Personal Development and Review Plans to ensure staff are fully trained and working to achieve the Action Plan targets.

APPENDIX 1: STAFFORDSHIRE PARTNERSHIPS

SUMMARY OF STAFFORDSHIRE PARTNERSHIPS

November 2007

Partnership	Partners	Work	Contact Person
E government	All Staffs authorities	To improve customer services and provide integrated services where possible. Joint procurement including CRM application	Tim Chesworth 01782 236897
North Staffs Housing Market Area Strategy Group	Stoke City, Newcastle Under Lyme, Stafford Borough, Staffordshire Moorlands and East Staffs Strategic Reps, plus Planning reps, Housing Corporation, GOWM, Regional Housing Board and Renew	North Housing Market Area Strategic Housing matters, joint working, planning and input into the Regional Housing Strategy	Alan Slater, Stoke on Trent City Council, 01782 234567
Staffordshire Drugs and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)	All staff authorities + health agencies	Set up in 1995 to tackle drug and alcohol misuse through a partnership of key agencies	01785 223176
Staffordshire Rural Forum	Staffs authorities (except Stoke and Tamworth)	Focuses on the Rural Economy, Established to support Rural Areas, post BSE and Foot and Mouth. Has an action plan	Hannah Chadwick 01785 277345
Children & Young People's Locality Board	County-wide partnership of public sector and voluntary sector agencies	Development and monitoring of Strategy; allocation of Children Fund monies. Input to the LAA	Stafford BC currently chairing.
Joint Health & Social Care Performance Improvement Board.	County-wide partnership of public (including PCTS, District Councils Social Service) and voluntary sector agencies	Coordination of groups looking at e.g. mental health, learning difficulties, the young, the elderly;	Lichfield DC (Nina Dawes 01543 308001) represents Staffordshire Chief

Partnership	Partners	Work	Contact Person
There are also partnership boards covering Older People, welfare to Work, Learning Disability, Mental Health, & Children's Partnership which report to this Board.		and delivery of the Staffordshire Conference health improvement agenda.	Executives.
Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Strategic Partnership (SSSP)	Public, private and voluntary sector	County wide Community strategy	Christina Webb, Manager 01283 508040
Staffordshire Planning Forum	Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent and all Staffordshire Districts	To provide Staffordshire Authorities with a voice at Regional level in planning and transportation issues within new national planning/regional structures Started 2003	Hon Sec – Nigel Pursey, Chief Executive County Council 01785 215153
Staffordshire Development Officers Group	All Districts / County Council / Stoke / Government Office.	To consider planning, development, regeneration and transportation issues.	Officer group. Head of service level. (Planning / Regen. Depts) Stafford's contact: C Hindle 01785 619295
Staffordshire Plus	Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent and all Staffordshire Districts, Nuneaton & Bedworth, North Warwickshire	Capacity Building bid, and emerging partnership on helping each other to build capacity Leadership Member training Middle management Performance management Strategic and service planning	Nina Dawes Lichfield District Council 01543 308001

Partnership	Partners	Work	Contact Person
		Change management/ organisational development Equalities and Diversity	
City of Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Local Government Association	All Councils	Purpose and terms of reference agreed by Leaders and Chief Executives of all Councils in May 2004.	Support role being recruited.
North Staffs Housing Market Area Partnership Forum.	Stoke City, Newcastle Under Lyme, Stafford Borough, Staffordshire Moorlands, East Staffs DC + private landlords, Registered Social Landlords, voluntary sector reps & Housing Finance sector reps.	Quarterly forum meetings on specific housing-related themes lead by the North Housing Market Area Strategy Group	Chaired by Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire Supported Housing Network	Staffordshire County Council, all Staffordshire Districts, Staffordshire-based RSLs and voluntary sector groups.	Forum for supported housing issues in Staffordshire, development of mutual policies and working practices.	Tony Price, South Staffs Housing Association 01785 277008
Mental Health Supported Accommodation Working Group	Staffordshire County Council, all Staffordshire Districts, Staffordshire-based RSLs and voluntary sector groups.	Development of county-wide accommodation solutions for housing people with mental health needs.	Emily Skeet, Supporting People, 01785 278561
PAIRS Domestic Violence Forum	Staffordshire County Council, all Staffordshire Districts, Staffordshire-based RSLs and voluntary sector groups.	To share good practice, to facilitate strategic response to County-wide issues, to secure facilities and funding.	Staffordshire SDVS, Charlotte Preece 01785 279931
CACH (Chase Against Crimes of Hate)	Staffordshire County Council, all Staffordshire Districts, Staffordshire-based RSLs and voluntary sector groups. Police, Probation and Prison Services.	Reducing hate crimes in Staffordshire. Prevention of crime, homelessness. Training and distribution of information	PC Jo Shaw. Staffordshire Police. 01785234157

Partnership	Partners	Work	Contact Person
Housing Association Liaison Group	All RSLs with properties in Stafford Borough, Housing Corporation	LA – RSL interface, Nominations, Developments, policy issues	Housing Policy Manager Stafford Borough Council 01785 619380
Substance Misuse Accommodation Working Group	All Staffordshire LAs and RSLs, Staffordshire County Council, YMCA, Prison, Probation, ADSIS, Burton Addiction Centre, DAT, Arch North Staffs, The Lyme Trust.	Tackling Drug and Alcohol misuse in Staffordshire.	Lisa Baskerville, Staffordshire County DAT
Staffordshire Learning Disability Partnership Board	Staffordshire Social Services, South Staffs Healthcare, North Staffs Combined Health Care, Housing Providers. MENCAP CVS, PCTs.	Promoting services for people with learning disabilities.	Jane Munton-Davies, Staffordshire Social Services.
Staffordshire Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership	Staffordshire County Council , Education & Lifelong Learning, LAs, NSPCC, Healthcare Trusts, Voluntary Groups, PCTs, CYPSP, CAMHS, YOT.	Promoting Children's health and care issues.	Nigel Pursey, Chief Executive, Staffordshire County Council
Staffordshire Housing Policy Officer's Group	All Staffordshire LA Policy Officers	Information sharing, Policy alignment, Interpretation & Implementation of new National & regional policy	Housing Policy Manager, Stafford Borough Council. 01785 619380
Stafford Borough Private Landlords Forum	All private landlords, SBC Environment & Health, Housing Services	Information sharing and consultation with landlords	Karen Gilliatt, Stafford Borough Council 01785 619370
Regional Homelessness Strategy Action Plan Implementation Group	Leads from 4 Sub-regions, Health, Education, Probation, Voluntary Sector, Housing Corporation, Business	Implementing the Regional Homelessness Strategy	Jean Templeton, St Basil's 0121 772 2483
Supporting People Officer's Board and Supporting People Commissioning Body	All Staffordshire LAs, Elected Members	Supporting people strategy action plan implementation. Commissioning services.	Emily Skeet, Staffordshire County Council 01785 277586



Action Plan 2006 - 2011

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO 1: IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF THE HOUSING STOCK ACROSS ALL TENURES						
Challenge/Task	Outcomes	Measured Milestones	Resources	Target Date	Lead	Partnerships
Decent Homes Standard	Reduced number of vulnerable households living in non-decent housing. Improved health and wellbeing from improved living conditions	60 properties made decent each year	£250,000 (Annually)	2007/8	Environmental Health Manager	Orbit Care and Repair
Address the problem of empty properties in the Borough	Reduction in the number of empty properties; improve the local environment; reduce the fear of crime associated with empty properties; increase in the number affordable housing.	50 properties brought back into use	£20,000 (Annually)	2011	Environmental Health Manager	Registered Social Landlords Private Sector Landlords
Affordable warmth						

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO 1: IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF THE HOUSING STOCK ACROSS ALL TENURES

Challenge/Task	Outcomes	Measured Milestones	Resources	Target Date	Lead	Partnerships
Improvements in the physical condition of rented properties	Improved standards in the private rented market. Greater availability of good quality affordable housing. Greater diversity of choice in the housing market. Private rented property improved to meet the decent homes standard.	10 grants awarded annually	£30,000 (annually)	2008	Environmental Health Manager	Private Sector Landlords Landlord Forum

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO 2: PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

Challenge/Task	Outcomes	Measured Milestones	Resources	Target Date	Lead	Partnerships
To undertake a complete review of operational working practices within the Homelessness and Advice Team with a view to establishing a housing options and prevention service	Reduction in Homelessness presentations and the number of homeless cases duties accepted. Reduction in the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation.	10% reduction annually to reach less than 100 acceptances a year.	£38,000	2010	Housing Policy Manager	DCLG, CAB, Broxtowe BC.
To undertake research into Homelessness to identify specific client groups and their needs.	A comprehensively informed review of homelessness within the Borough and the local housing market area.	Research identified by a Homeless Review to be undertaken April 2008	£20,000	2008	Housing Policy Manager	
To complete the Homelessness Strategy 2008.	A Homelessness strategy for 2008 - 2013	Homelessness Review Completed. Focus Group Established Research on Rural Homelessness Completed	Staff time Research Budget £20,000	July 2008	Housing Policy Manager	Homelessness Task & Finish Review. Multi-Agency Focus Group.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO 2: PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

Challenge/Task	Outcomes	Measured Milestones	Resources	Target Date	Lead	Partnerships
		<p>Consultation with stakeholders</p> <p>Draft Strategy For Consultation</p>				
To establish a homeless prevention culture	A range of tools for homeless prevention.	<p>Establish a homelessness prevention fund</p> <p>Sanctuary scheme</p> <p>Recruit a Homelessness Prevention Officer</p> <p>Establish a Homelessness Forum</p>	<p>£11,000</p> <p>Homeless Prevention Grant</p> <p>£35,000</p>	April 2008	Housing Policy Manager	<p>Supporting People</p> <p>Stafford SDVS</p> <p>Homelessness Forum</p> <p>Multi-Agency Focus Group</p>
To continue to work with planners, developers, the Housing Corporation and Housing Providers for new affordable	An increase in the supply of new affordable housing in the Borough, particularly in rural locations.	<p>18% of all new units constructed annually to be affordable. (LAA Target)</p> <p>Complete Interim planning guidance on affordable housing</p>	Officer time	<p>Policy Document Complete by October 2007</p> <p>Annual Targets</p>	Housing Policy Manager	RSLs, Housing Corporation, Planning, Developers, Parish Councils, North Staffs Strategic Partnership. Forward Planning

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO 2: PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

Challenge/Task	Outcomes	Measured Milestones	Resources	Target Date	Lead	Partnerships
housing solutions						
To work jointly with partners in the social and private housing sectors, voluntary and statutory sector to establish comprehensive homeless prevention and housing options service.	Joined-up responses to service user needs, maximising resources and providing accommodation and support responses that are sustainable.	Linked to Homelessness Prevention milestones Establish a North Housing Market Areas Homelessness Strategic Group	Officer time	Ongoing work Reviewed quarterly	Housing Policy Manager	North Housing Market Homelessness Group Regional Homelessness Strategy Action Plan Implementation Group
To work with stakeholders, RSLs and the County Council to replace the former Stafford Homelessness Hostel with a new build 32-bed Supported Housing Project.	A new purpose-built supported housing scheme for single people.	Commence building August 2007	£300,000	2009	Housing Policy Manager	Steering Group.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO 3: INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Challenge/Task	Outcomes	Measured Milestones	Resources	Target Date	Lead	Partnerships
To review of the S106 qualifying criteria in response to PPS3,	Lower the S106 qualifying threshold from 25 units to at least 15.	Spring 2007	Officer Time	2007	Housing Policy Manager Paul Windmill	Housing Strategy and Forward Planning
Investigate alternative sources of affordable homes.	To address the levels of need identified in the Borough.	Staff training to increase awareness Complete Interim planning guidance on affordable housing	Officer time	Ongoing Policy Document Complete by October 2007	Housing Policy Manager	Housing Strategy and Forward Planning
Produce a revised robust Supplementary Planning Guidance on affordable Housing.	To provide robust information and Guidance to RSLs and Developers to facilitate the development process for S106.	Complete Interim planning guidance on affordable housing	Officer Time	2007	Housing Policy Manager Paul Windmill	Housing Strategy and Forward Planning
Work with Sub-regional partners to produce a Sub-Regional Housing Market Assessment.	A Sub-Regional evidence base to replace or supplement the Housing Needs Survey.	Document Complete December 2007	£5,000	2007	Housing Policy Manager	North Housing Market Area Strategic Partnership

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO 3: INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Challenge/Task	Outcomes	Measured Milestones	Resources	Target Date	Lead	Partnerships
Jointly produce a Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment.	To identify and provide the evidence base for addressing the needs of the travelling community.	Document Complete December 2007	£9,000	2007	Stephen Ward	North Housing Market Area Strategic Partnership
Work with RSL partners, developers and the Housing Corporation to facilitate affordable housing schemes with and without public funds.	A sub-regional Investment strategy. Move forward on existing Housing Corporation funding and develop bids for future investment.	Building work on existing project commences July 2007 Bids made annually.	£300,000	2009	Housing Policy Manager	RSLs Housing Corporation Developers
Work with Mercian Housing to maximise the Homebuyer scheme and develop a housing register for affordable housing applicants.	To facilitate the needs of those seeking intermediate housing solutions.	Attend briefing sessions as required Incorporate scheme into affordable housing policy document	Officer time	Ongoing Policy Document Complete by October 2007	Housing Policy Manager	Mercian Housing Association North Housing Market Area Strategic Partnership

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO 4: PROMOTE INDEPENDENT LIVING

Challenge/Task	Outcomes	Measured Milestones	Resources	Target Date	Lead	Partnerships
To ensure the housing needs of disabled people are supported and that they are able to remain in their own home.	<p>Increase in the availability of adapted homes</p> <p>Meet the expectation that people prefer to live in their own home.</p>	120 disabled facilities grant completed	£567,000 (Annually)	On-going	Environmental Health Manager	<p>Staffordshire County Council;</p> <p>Registered Social Landlords,</p> <p>Orbit HIAS</p>
Review administrative process	<p>Improved seamless adaptation service provided for customers.</p> <p>Time taken for client to benefit from adaptations reduced</p>	<p>New process agreed and in place</p> <p>Revised funding arrangements</p>	To be identified as part of the review	<p>December 2007</p> <p>April 2008</p>	Environmental Health Manager	<p>Staffordshire County Council;</p> <p>Registered Social Landlords,</p> <p>Orbit HIAS</p>
Development of a register of adapted properties.	<p>Increased choice for disabled people.</p> <p>Greater use of existing resources</p>		To be determined	April 2010	Environmental Health Manager	<p>Staffordshire County Council;</p> <p>Registered Social Landlords,</p>

STRATEGIC PRIORITY NO 5: PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Challenge/Task	Outcomes	Measured Milestones	Resources	Target Date	Lead	Partnerships
To engage with partnerships where there is a proven and tangible need that will make a material difference to the housing in the Borough.	Effective partnerships which result in tangible benefits to the Borough.	Carry out a Review of Partnerships Align partnerships with strategic priorities and outcomes	Officer time	September 2007	Housing Policy Manager Environmental Health Manager	See Appendix 1
Aligning services with the LAA	Effective partnership working with deliverable and resourced outcomes	Identified areas of engagement within the relevant blocks of the LAA and a plan in place to deliver the outcomes	Officer time	December 2007	Housing Policy Manager Environmental Health Manager	LAA Partners
Working in partnership to achieve Sub-regional goals and economies of scale	Sub-regional policy and Strategies	Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment	Officer time Plus £16,200	2008	Housing Policy Manager Environmental Health Manager	North Housing Market Area (NHMA) Partners

		NHMA Housing Market Assessment	Officer time Plus £5,400	2008	Housing Policy Manager Environmental Health Manager	North Housing Market Area (NHMA) Partners
	Choice-based Lettings Scheme operating	Lead Officer appointed Steering Group established Project Plan Developed Sub-groups established	Officer time	2009	Housing Policy Manager	North Housing Market Area (NHMA) Partners

OTHER KEY ACTIONS:

Challenge/Task	Outcomes	Measured Milestones	Resources	Target Date	Lead	Partnerships
Regularly update of the Housing Strategy	Up-to-date figures and relevant actions	Update completed	Officer time	May 2009	Housing Policy Manager Environmental Health Manager	Focus Group of reps from key organisations
Monitoring progress on Housing Strategy Action Plan	Confirm progress against milestones	Milestones identified in Action Plan. Quarterly progress report to Management Team Annual report to Community Scrutiny	Officer time	Ongoing	Housing Policy Manager	
The principles of Sustainable Development and Climate Change to be embedded into policy and practice	Good practice investigated and incorporated into policy	Sustainable Development and Climate Change quality check	Officer time	May 2009	Housing Policy Manager	Agenda 21 Team