



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Enabling and Delivering Housing Choice

Housing Strategy 2006 – 2011

FOREWORD

This is the Housing Strategy for Northampton 2006-11 and has been produced at a time of major change and challenge for the Borough.

Northampton is part of the Government designated Milton Keynes-South Midlands Growth Area which means new houses and new jobs are required as the borough grows to a town of 300,000 people by 2021. This is a rate of growth the town has some track record of dealing with; and following the work of the Northampton Development Corporation, we have come full circle in again being identified for growth in the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan for accommodating the economic growth requirements of the South East of England.

We need to ensure that the right accommodation is being provided to meet the changing needs of the current and future residents of Northampton. Increasing house prices, the supply of affordable and decent accommodation, housing investment, support for vulnerable people, safe neighbourhoods and customer choice all are all important considerations in understanding and responding to the wide range of housing needs.

Northampton Borough Council wants to produce a Fit For Purpose Housing Strategy – this means it is capable of achieving exactly what needs undertaking. As your Council continues on its journey to recovery, we have considered how best we can produce an effective and robust housing strategy that responds to the housing needs of the borough. Councillors of all parties and key partners have come together to form the Housing Strategy Steering Panel to demonstrate political and partner commitment and ownership to the success of the housing strategy. We are supported by Northampton Borough Council officers, who are undertaking corporate working through a Housing Strategy Project Board to ensure that we are providing an effective corporate response to the challenges of the housing strategy. We intend to increase our partner and customer engagement in the development and delivery of the housing strategy.

The Council has developed a clear understanding of its overall priorities, and the role of housing, regeneration and growth are featured prominently in our new documents such as our Service Improvement Plan and the Corporate Plan. We intend to show that our Corporate working is, and can, translate into service improvements on the ground in key areas such as housing.

We hope that you agree with our Vision, our strategic priorities, our objectives and proposals for implementation of the Strategy.

Councillor John Caswell

Portfolio Holder, Regeneration and Growth
Chair of Housing Strategy Steering Panel

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1 INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY

1.1 Purpose

This Housing Strategy sets out our goals, objectives and action plans to deliver the housing vision of Northampton Borough Council over the next five years. We have worked with partners, customers and other stakeholders to develop this strategy.

There are many drivers, feeders and influencers for the Housing Strategy which are described and analysed in detail throughout the strategy and appendices. Appendix 1 Strategy Development explains our processes in detail. It demonstrates that Northampton is working in a dynamic and changing environment, with a range of opportunities open to us to develop and deliver a transformational housing strategy.

We have developed a vision for housing in Northampton to 2011 based upon consideration of our aspirations and alignment with other key strategic plans and vision statements.

1.2 Legal Status

We are tasked to develop a Fit For Purpose Housing Strategy. Development of a Housing Strategy has been a statutory duty for local authorities since the 2003 Local Government Act. The Government introduced Fit For Purpose Criteria to assess the effectiveness of local housing strategies.

1.3 Our Vision

This Housing Strategy sets out our aspirational goals for the next five years, which are supported by a series of strategic priorities, for which objectives and annual action plans are set. Our vision for housing and the strategic priorities to support that are summarised below.

Our Vision for housing in Northampton

We will promote the provision of well-maintained, affordable and environmentally sustainable homes of all tenures, and communities where people choose to live. We will provide excellent customer services and additional support where required.

1.4 Our Strategic Priorities

- Increase the supply of affordable housing
- Create sustainable communities
- Improve the Housing Service
- Provide support to the most vulnerable people
- Meet the Decent Homes Standard

2 WHERE ARE WE NOW?

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 In this part of the Housing Strategy we consider the current context for housing in Northampton, both internal and external. The purpose is to analyse and understand the current market and operations. We consider the Northampton context and wider strategic priorities, the housing market in terms of supply and demand, and partnership working/consultation with a range of our stakeholders.

2.2 The Borough Council Context

2.2.1 The Borough Council

Northampton Borough Council is one of seven district and borough councils in Northamptonshire, and although the town of Northampton sits in the East Midlands Region, it is also part of the Milton Keynes South Midlands Growth Area and has an important role to play in delivering the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation strategies.

The Council is the largest district/borough council in Northamptonshire, with a population of approximately 194,500 people living in 85,000 households. Northampton has the fastest growing population in the East Midlands – 5.9% growth since 1991. 8.5% of the population are from minority ethnic communities.

2.2.2 Comprehensive Performance Assessment

The Council was classified a poor performing authority following the 2003 Audit Commission's CPA inspection. Since then we have implemented a series of changes and restructurings which are moving the Council towards improvement.

2.2.3 Our Response to the CPA

The Council is striving to improve services and performance across all services. A Recovery Plan was developed immediately following the CPA inspection, which enabled action to be taken on the key priorities. The Recovery Plan has now been replaced by the Strategic Improvement Plan for 2006/2009, which incorporates and integrates all CPA, Inspection and Audit recommendations and actions into one comprehensive improvement plan. This Plan is supported by an Improvement Delivery Plan.

The Audit Commission's first review assessed us as having made slow but visible progress in our recovery. A further report will be issued shortly.

2.2.4 Corporate Plan

The Northampton Borough Council Vision is:

We will work with, and for, the people of Northampton to build an increasingly prosperous, healthy, safe and attractive town of which we are all proud. We will strive to maximise and sustain opportunities for all.

The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's ambitions and priorities for the town. The plan for 2006/2007 focuses upon continuing our recovery, as recognised above, and develops six strategic priorities. The Plan can be accessed using the links in our references at Appendix 14.

2.2.5 Strategic Improvement Plan

The Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP) replaces the Recovery Plan, and brings all of our improvement requirements together. The SIP is available from the Council on request.

2.2.6 Best Value Performance Plan

This is the fourth key strategic plan for the Council, linking with the Corporate Plan, Community Strategy and SIP. The priorities are those set within the Corporate Plan, and targets are set for achievement of those priorities.

2.2.7 Housing Services Inspection

The Housing Service provided by the Council was inspected by the Audit Commission in October 2004 and awarded One Star with uncertain prospects for improvement. Amongst the key areas identified for improvement were:

- The housing strategy is not fit for purpose and the strategic approach to respond to the growth agenda is not yet developed
- Investment plan to deliver decent homes not yet in place.
- Performance in the key areas of homelessness decisions, income recovery, responsive repairs and letting empty properties, although showing some improvement, remains weak.

We have invested considerable resources already in improving areas of poor performance, for example in respect of planned and responsive maintenance, and specifically in terms of void re-let times, and also in respect of customer care. The specific improvements are reported in Appendix 4, Progress Against Existing Targets. We have taken the outstanding issues into account when developing the Strategic Priorities for our Housing Strategy and will consider the outcomes of the 'Light Touch' Housing Inspection of October 2006.

2.2.8 Asset Management Strategy

We have commissioned consultants to help us formulate an asset management strategy and investment plan in order to deliver the decent homes programme. The Investment Plan identified a funding gap and the final report will include options to address this. The Asset Management Strategy will be completed during 2007/08.

2.2.9 Conclusions and Implications for the Housing Strategy

There are several themes running through all of the Council's contextual plans and issues, which develop as a golden thread and which we have taken into account when developing the Strategic Priorities for housing.

The themes are:

- Improving our weakest services
- Decent Homes
- Communities
- Tackling deprivation and inequality, and supporting the most vulnerable members of our communities.

2.3 The Wider Strategic Context

2.3.1 Introduction

We work in a complex strategic environment and a range of national, regional and sub-regional issues and drivers were identified as influencing the development of this Housing Strategy. Affordable housing supply, sustainable communities, decent homes and support to vulnerable people are all national and regional issues as well as being local to us. The Housing Strategy sets out our priorities and objectives to support the national regional and sub-regional agenda as well as the local priorities.

There are major opportunities for the town of Northampton to grow and develop – as part of the Milton Keynes South Midlands growth strategy, 30,000 new homes were planned for Northampton between 2001 and 2021 but this figure has been subject to a legal challenge. The current revised target is 31,500 new homes, phased so that 6,500 will be delivered during 2001 – 2006, 7,250 during 2006 – 2011, and 8,875 during 2011 – 2016 and 2016 – 2021. West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) will support the delivery of economic, social and housing growth in West Northamptonshire, including Northampton.

There are also major challenges for us in Northampton – housing demand is rising, house prices are increasing and there are affordability issues for many of our citizens. There are 5,355 households on our register for social housing allocations, whilst our stock continues to reduce because of Right to Buy.

2.3.2 Sustainable Communities Plan

The Sustainable Communities Plan (February 2003) established a programme for sustainable growth in housing supply in the wider South East to 2021 and beyond. The key messages for the Council were that the provision of new homes should keep pace with the numbers of new households and that radical action is needed now. The Housing Strategy aims to support the achievement of the growth targets and demonstrates our commitment to mixed, successful and sustainable communities.

2.3.3 Decent Homes Standard

We have a target, set by Government in 2000, to achieve the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) in all social rented homes by 2010. In 2002 the Government Spending Review confirmed the DHS target for social homes and further extended the target for local authorities to achieve DHS in the private sector, with a focus upon vulnerable households.

The current target is:

by 2010, to bring all social housing into decent condition, with most of the improvement taking place in deprived areas, and increasing the proportion of private housing in decent condition occupied by vulnerable groups.

Our estimate of non-decent homes in Northampton is:

- Council rented housing stock 20%
- Private sector 28%
- Number of vulnerable households in the private sector occupying non-decent homes 4770 (equal to 4.99% of the stock).

2.3.4 The Barker Review

The Barker Review of Housing Supply was published by the Government in March 2004. The clear point emerging from the review is that a step change in housing supply is essential.

The implications for development of this Housing Strategy are that the current rate of completions in Northampton is insufficient to meet needs and demands and that more homes of all tenures and price levels are needed within a relatively short timescale.

2.3.5 Regional Spatial Strategy

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) provides a broad development strategy for the East Midlands to 2021. The strategy identifies Northampton as one of five Principal Urban Areas in the East Midlands. It sets targets to increase supply of affordable homes to 2021 and provides a further target to 2031 as an uncommitted planning assumption. The target for Northamptonshire is to provide 4,975 new homes annually to 2021 – this target is consistent with the detailed figures included within the Milton Keynes South Midlands sub-regional strategy (MKSM).

2.3.6 Regional Housing Strategy

The Regional Housing Strategy (RHS) for the East Midlands aims to deliver national housing priorities in a way that is appropriate for the East Midlands. We have worked with the Regional Housing Board in preparing the RHS, and we are playing a leading role in developing better working relationships at both a regional and sub-regional level.

2.3.7 *Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3)*

The recent publication of PPS3 and its accompanying related guidance to local authorities *Delivering Affordable Housing* is a valuable contribution to the issues facing us. It introduces a new definition of affordable housing which is designed to ensure that genuinely affordable housing is produced for households in need over the long term. Local authorities are required to set an overall target for the amount of affordable housing to be provided across the plan, with the aim of ensuring provision meets the needs of both current and future occupiers. There are three themes running through *Delivering Affordable Housing*: -

- The provision of high quality homes in mixed sustainable communities for those in need.
- Widening the opportunities for home ownership.
- Offering greater quality, flexibility and choice to those who rent.

We are well-placed to respond corporately to this agenda. The responsibility for Housing Strategy and Planning Policy are already integrated within one team in the Council. Further, the themes within *Delivering Affordable Housing* are themes which have run throughout the development of this Housing Strategy.

2.3.8 *English Partnerships National Brownfield Strategy*

Published for consultation in October 2006, the new National Brownfield Strategy aims to help councils to bring more land forward more quickly for development. The new Strategy will be published early in 2007, and we will reconsider the emphasis within this strategy following its publication. We are well-placed in relation to land supply, and in fact already have in place a joint Brownfield Initiative Board with English Partnerships (EP). EP has a large landholding in Northampton following transfer of the Council's residential land bank. The land bank was originally Commission for the New Towns land which was transferred to Northampton Borough Council. The Commission was later incorporated into English Partnerships and the land was effectively transferred back.

2.3.9 *Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub-regional Strategy*

Published in March 2005 the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy (MKSM) sets out the growth plans for the sub-region. The sub-region sits at the intersection of three regions – East Midlands, East of England and South East.

Northampton is a key location in the sub-region, and is identified as one of the locations for growth. It will develop as a Principal Urban Area for the MKSM and the wider region. We will need to significantly increase the rate of housing completions to meet the MKSM allocated growth figures.

2.3.10 West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC)

WNDC has been established as an Urban Development Corporation to help deliver sustainable growth in West Northamptonshire. The core area of WNDC is situated in Northampton, Daventry and Towcester. It sets out a vision for Northampton as a world class sustainable city at the heart of a dynamic west Northamptonshire economy.

WNDC has a range of powers which impact upon, and drive and influence our housing strategy. Development Control powers and land assembly powers mean that WNDC can use compulsory purchase powers and can also extract a proportion of the land value created by development. WNDC also have a new Regeneration and Strategic Development Control Team which is available to supplement our capacity.

2.3.11 Infrastructure

Funding for the infrastructure which is an essential component of growth and sustainable communities will be drawn from both private and public sources, and there is an emerging and changing policy context for us to deal with.

This is an agenda which we are observing with interest, and will develop objectives and action plans to address over the coming year. It is important that we are able to understand the likely nature and timings of private sector contributions and that we endeavour to secure funding for early delivery of infrastructure.

2.3.12 Supporting People

Supporting People (SP) is the funding programme which now plans and pays for the provision of housing related support to the elderly and vulnerable people. Northamptonshire County Council is the commissioning body for SP funded services in Northampton and so this Housing Strategy complements their role accordingly. The Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010, which identifies the priority groups in need of support, is a key driver in our priorities. We will develop a Supported Housing Strategy specifically for the housing needs of our customers in those priority groups in Northampton.

2.3.13 *Northamptonshire Local Area Agreement*

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) has been developed in partnership with the County Council and the seven local authorities with the aim of working together to:

Strengthen communities, deliver significant improvements in quality of life for people and provide equal life chances, by working through purposeful partnerships that are grounded in a clear common performance framework.

LAAs aim to improve local public service delivery, by providing a new framework for the relationship between central and local government. This has enabled us to develop a set of priorities for service delivery across the county. We have negotiated and agreed them with Central Government.

The Northamptonshire LAA has four priority blocks. The Economic Development, Enterprise and Growth block, which is the block linked to housing, focuses on:

- Tackling deprivation in line with the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy
- Increasing the affordability, supply, quality and condition of housing
- Increasing accessibility.

2.3.14 *Northamptonshire Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy*

The County Council and the seven district and borough councils in Northamptonshire have a responsibility for community planning, as well as delivering many of the services that are important contributors to neighbourhood renewal.

The strategy develops three distinct but interlinked approaches for planning and action in Northamptonshire's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. These are:

- Priority intervention areas
- Sustaining and developing neighbourhoods
- Support for specific issues in rural neighbourhoods.

2.3.15 *Local Strategic Partnership*

The Community Strategy *Aim 4 Northampton* is developed by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). Development of the LSP has been led by the Council, and the Community Strategy, aims to be a comprehensive and cross-cutting strategy developed to improve the economic, social and environmental health of the town by supporting the delivery of first class services.

The long term housing aim from the Community Strategy is to increase the supply and range of housing and provide care and support services to those who need them. Housing priorities resulting from the Community Strategy are:

- Achievement of the Decent Homes Standard
- Improving the Supply of affordable housing
- Provision of support to vulnerable groups
- Sustainable communities and regeneration.

2.3.16 Conclusions and Implications for the Housing Strategy

Analysis of the wider strategic context and priorities develops further themes which are taken into consideration when developing the housing strategy:

- Northampton is a key location both on a regional and sub-regional basis, and as such is a sub-regional leader.
- Northampton has a further geographical significance, in terms of being within both the East Midlands and the MKSM sub-regions, and also being effectively part of the Greater South East, therefore
- We must ensure that Northampton fulfils this key role by pursuing a Housing Strategy which recognises:
 - The need for an increase in the supply of housing
 - The need to make home ownership more affordable
 - The need for swift action
 - The need to tackle inequalities
 - The need to ensure delivery of infrastructure to support new homes and communities
 - The opportunities offered by our Housing and Planning functions working corporately in the delivery of homes
 - The opportunities offered by our existing, close working relationships with EP to bring forward brownfield sites for development.

2.4 The Local Housing Market

2.4.1 Introduction

This section considers the housing market in Northampton in terms of supply and demand and also the current and projected future housing needs in the borough. We have invested in our housing market knowledge over the past year as a strategic priority and have assembled the knowledge in this section from the following sources and research programmes:

- Northampton Housing Market and Needs Study (2006)
- West Northamptonshire Housing Market Assessment (2006)
- BME Housing Study (2006)
- Northamptonshire Key Workers Study (2005)

2.4.2 Regional and Sub-regional Market Context

The Northampton housing market, like the housing and corporate strategies, has a growth agenda and trajectory, with strong demand side pressures, due to demographic growth and the fact that within Northampton, relative to other urban areas in the East Midlands and beyond, prosperity is high and deprivation low. The strong housing market and price rises of recent years mean that housing affordability is now a big issue in Northampton.

Northampton is part of a sub-regional housing market which also encompasses Daventry and South Northamptonshire with Wellingborough on the “border”. Under the Milton Keynes South Midlands growth plan Daventry will grow by 10,800 homes between 2001 and 2021, whilst South Northamptonshire will develop 6,600 homes.

2.4.3 Market Drivers

The key driving influences upon the Housing Strategy are:

- Population growth projections – 198.3k 2001 – 221.8k by 2021.
- Households on the register which have increased from 4,356 in 2002 to 5,355 in 2006.
- Homelessness stood at between 400 and 450 households per year in Northampton and was increasing year on year. Homeless acceptances were:
 - 2001/02 356
 - 2002/03 414
 - 2003/04 420
 - 2004/05 455

In addition there are many households who face street homelessness and do not figure in the figures for statutory homelessness

- However, preventative measures have led to a reduced trend with 368 acceptances in 2005/06 and we are currently experiencing our lowest quarterly acceptances in the last five years.
- The Housing Needs study estimates that 4135 new affordable homes for let are needed in 2006 against a supply from all sources of 2950. This means a crude annual shortage of 1185 affordable units for let per year. These figures are for new *lets* required, not necessarily new properties.
- The mix of property types and tenure types currently available does not match aspirations.
- House prices are creating affordability problems, in particular for entry level housing.
- Income levels in the Borough are low, in particular key workers and first time buyers.

2.4.4 *West Northamptonshire Housing Market Assessment*

The Housing Market Assessment was commissioned during 2006, and is a key tool for aligning our housing strategy with the overarching sub-regional agenda to balance housing markets.

2.4.5 *Northampton Housing Market Study and Needs Estimates 2006*

This study was also commissioned during 2006, and provides a robust assessment of Northampton's housing needs and markets. As a result of the two housing market studies we now have a comprehensive and up to date knowledge of the housing markets in which we operate. Full details of the studies and their findings are outlined in Appendices 3 and 4. A summary of the key findings is outlined below.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>What this means for us</i>
Population and household growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population growth in West Northamptonshire will be faster than the East Midlands • The average household size in the sub-region is predicted to decrease to 2.20 from 2.41 by 2026 • Northampton has a relatively small geographical area and a relatively large population • The sub-region has failed to attract or retain young people • The level of mature working age population has increased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand for housing will continue to be strong and we need to support a step change in housing supply across all tenures • There will be more demand for smaller units in new build developments across all price ranges • The size and type of affordable housing provision should be decided by priority needs • Population densities will continue to increase • We need to take action to encourage young people to live in Northampton • The economic activity rate might reduce

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>What this means for us</i>
House Sales and Prices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northampton has slightly higher than average levels of owner-occupation • Entry level price for Northampton is £109,250 • Average household income for 2006 for Northampton estimated to be £28,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even entry level housing is beyond the reach of many households who aspire to home ownership. • Therefore house prices are prohibiting households from entering the housing market • Affordability will be a key consideration for our housing strategy in the long term
Sub-regional and sub-markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northampton has a variety of house types, prices and tenures in submarkets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A single borough-wide approach to new housing provision is not appropriate
Housing Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,400 households moved within Northampton during 2004/205 who could not afford entry level house prices • 6,681 households on the register 2005 • Study estimates needs for 4135 new affordable homes for 2006 • Study estimates that from a total supply of 1500 homes per year for the next five years, the proportion which should be affordable should be 78% in 2006, reducing to 46% by 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A growth in demand for social rented housing • A growing need for affordable housing • We will need to support the timely provision of affordable housing • It would be unrealistic for us to demand these percentages and the draft HMA recommends continuation of the current 35% target
Housing Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery rates have been less than planned in Northampton to 2005 • Estimates for current year suggest 1500 completions • Amount of supply designated as affordable has been below the target rate, but it is gradually improving, from 9.1% 2002/2003 to 14.6 2003/2004 • Occupation levels of +2 rooms for 50+ in Northampton – 54% in the owner-occupied sector, 1.4% in the social sector, 1.4% private rented • 3.1% of the housing stock empty according to census 2001 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A step change in housing supply is needed to meet the challenges of our agenda • A target for affordable housing on new developments is important and we have proposed a 35% target

2.5 Partnerships

2.5.1 Introduction

This section outlines the communications and consultation strategy which we have employed in developing the strategy. It demonstrates our commitment to partnership working. We want partners and customers to be direct participants in the development and implementation of the housing strategy, in addition to being consultees and recipients of information Community Development and Community Forums, LSP facilitation and Neighbourhood Renewal all sit alongside Housing Strategy within the Regeneration and Growth corporate area, following a recent restructure.

2.5.2 Existing and Emerging Partnerships

We are working to a challenging change agenda, and the housing strategy is developed in a wider strategic context. We work jointly with the Local Strategic Partnership, Northamptonshire County Council and the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC). We contributed to the development of the Northamptonshire Local Area Agreement, with the County Council and other local authorities. We worked with the LSP to develop the Community Strategy and the emerging revised Community Vision for the town and with WNDC in contributing to the Growth Agenda. As a local authority we already work closely with the Police and other partners to tackle crime and disorder, within the remit of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act.

We have established an RSL Management Group and an RSL Development Group which meet regularly. We have existing tenant representative structures which will be improved during 2007/2008. We also meet regularly with developers, and have involved developers in the consultation process for this Strategy.

This partnership working has given the housing strategy a greater strategic fit and a more enhanced sense of ownership and responsibility from all key partners.

However, we know partnership working needs to extend further as the housing strategy translates into further action points. This strategy is supported by a one year action plan, but the increased involvement of partners and customers – facilitated by increased resources into this area – will enable further planning resulting in longer-term future action plans. We plan to work more closely with NTaCT, including inviting a representative to join the Housing Strategy Steering Panel (which will be renamed as the Strategic Housing Partnership). A Tenant Participation Strategy was adopted in December 2006 and implementation of that strategy will be a key

objective for the 2007/2008 Housing Strategy Action Plan (see Section 5).

2.5.3 The Role of Partnership Working

We have agreed Terms of Reference for our Housing Strategy Steering Panel, and believe it is important that Member and partner strategic thinking are able to come together for the benefit of our work. Rather than imposing solutions on our customers and partners, we want to see the further integration of the 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches to enable joint solutions and to facilitate a partnership based on shared values, trust, joint obligation and mutual respect. We have started this process by setting up the Housing Strategy Focus Group, consisting of Council tenants representatives, which met in February 2007, during the consultation period for this strategy. We also consulted with a number of other partners during the consultation period. We know some partners need to have further involvement in the housing strategy, including private developers and estate agents, and this will be facilitated as we embark on the consultation plan for the housing strategy

2.5.4 Influence on the Housing Strategy

The involvement of our partners and stakeholders needs to be recognised through evidence of their influence on the housing strategy. Appendices 11 and 12 to this document highlight how our partners have influenced the development of this housing strategy.

2.5.5 Consultation Plan

The Consultation Plan proposed for this strategy is attached at Appendix 11. We aim to increase the consultation on previous years in terms of quality and duration, and to make best use of electronic government. We will work more closely with the LSP, and a range of other partners, and we will develop consultation arrangements with groups whose views have been under-represented in the development of the housing strategy, such as private developers.

We recognise the importance of working closely with groups whose specific needs must be considered – such as disabled people, BME groups, and young people – and we will ensure that this input is used to provide services that reflect equality and diversity.

The consultation process was used to develop the draft of this Housing Strategy and has further informed the completion of this final version.

2.6 Progress Against Existing Commitments

2.6.1 *Introduction*

Northampton developed a Housing Strategy for 2005 – 2010 “Enabling and Delivering Housing Choice” in Consultation Draft Form. Although deemed not Fit for Purpose by the Government Office, the consultation draft, and the subsequent internal consultation draft did produce strategic aims and commitments, and developed action plans for the delivery of those commitments. We have considered those strategic priorities and commitments developed in previous iterations of the Housing Strategy as part of the process of developing options and objectives within this Strategy.

2.6.2 Since drafting our previous housing strategy, we have delivered a number of key changes as part of our journey to recovery. Following the appointment of a new Corporate Management Team, a Root and Branch restructure has been implemented which has seen new Managers and Team Leaders appointed, and new resources employed. In this context, the new action plan is more closely aligned with what is achievable than previous action plans, even though a considerable amount of progress has been made.

2.6.3 There are key themes which have influenced the development of this Housing Strategy:

- Affordability and choice
- Decent homes, across all tenures
- Support to vulnerable people
- Renewal, regeneration and communities

2.6.4 We have made progress in the development of each of these key themes. In terms of affordability and choice, we have improved our knowledge of housing markets and housing needs, through the commissioning of a number of surveys, and we have launched the New Build HomeBuy Initiative for local people. We have also implemented initiatives to help people access decent accommodation in the private rented sector – such as the rent deposit guarantee scheme.

2.6.5 Achieving the Decent Homes Standard is important across all tenures. A stock condition survey has been completed for our council housing stock, framed around the decent homes criteria. We are developing our work in the private sector to target households who are vulnerable, whilst recognising the importance of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).

- 2.6.6 The key focus for support to vulnerable people has been the development of preventative measures to reduce homelessness. The introduction of these measures has resulted in the reduction of homeless cases accepted to their lowest level for five years. We have also worked with the Northamptonshire Supporting People Team to identify and respond to the housing needs of a range of vulnerable groups.
- 2.6.7 We have worked closely with, and supported, local CASPAR initiatives recognising the links between housing and community safety and antisocial behaviour. In particular, the transfer of two medium rise blocks to Leicester Housing Association generated approximately £8 million of housing investment onto the Spring Boroughs estate.

3 WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

3.1 Our Vision

3.1.1 Introduction

Our Housing Strategy sets out goals, objectives and action plans to deliver the vision over the next five years. We have worked with partners, customers and other stakeholders to develop this strategy.

Our Vision for housing in Northampton

We will promote the provision of well-maintained, affordable and environmentally sustainable homes of all tenures, and communities where people choose to live. We will provide excellent customer services and additional support where required.

3.1.3 Context

There are many drivers, feeders and influencers for the Housing Strategy which are described and analysed in detail throughout the strategy and appendices. We are working in a dynamic and changing environment, with a range of opportunities open to us to develop and deliver a transformational housing strategy.

We have developed a vision for housing in Northampton to 2011 based upon consideration of our aspirations and alignment with other key strategic plans and vision statements.

3.1.4 Corporate Plan: Working for Northampton

We will work with, and for, the people of Northampton to build an increasingly prosperous, healthy, safe and attractive town of which we are proud. We will strive to maximise and sustain opportunities for all.

3.1.5 Northampton Community Strategy: Vision 2012

In 2012 Northampton will be a safe, clean and healthy town with an excellent environment, facilities and services. Its communities will be confident, educated, skilled and united. The town will be proud, prosperous and progressive, a place where history and innovation co-exist. All will enjoy a high quality of life and decent home within a diverse and inclusive community.

3.1.6 *Best Value Performance Plan: Housing Priority:*

Improve Northampton's housing by focusing on and improving our weakest services – revenue and benefits, void properties, decent homes standard, homelessness.

3.1.7 *Joint Core Strategy: Vision for Northampton:*

The Joint Core Spatial Strategy for Northampton is a Development Plan Document that is being produced jointly between the Councils of Daventry, South Northamptonshire and Northampton, as part of a Core Spatial Strategy for West Northamptonshire. It will set out the spatial vision, spatial objectives and strategy for the development of the Northampton Implementation Area.

Their vision for Northampton is currently in draft:

The principal town of Northampton will be a dynamic, regional, commercial, cultural and tourist centre with high quality residential accommodation which meets the needs of the existing and future population. There will be high performing academic and vocational education and training to enable those who live and/or work there to lead fulfilling lives. There will be a locally vibrant economy, supported by a well-educated and trained populace, and it will be noted for its excellent transport infrastructure. It will be a healthy town with higher than average life expectancy, contributed to by an energetic and integrated community in which poverty is eliminated.

3.1.8 *Northampton Borough Council: A Community Vision for 2031*

This is currently in draft:

By 2011 it will: be safer: be cleaner: be healthier: be recognised for good quality, environmentally friendly housing: be well-served by modern and efficient local government.

By 2021 it will: be a city: be a place made up from caring communities:

By 2031 it will: be defined by its excellent transport system: be a major regional cultural and economic centre.

3.2 Strategic Priorities

3.2.1 Introduction

We will achieve the Vision for the Northampton Housing Strategy through our five strategic priorities, which will direct our activities and resources for 2007/2008 and beyond. Our priorities are:

- Increase the supply of good quality affordable housing
- Create sustainable communities
- Improve the Housing Service
- Provide support to the most vulnerable people
- Meet the Decent Homes Standard

Our strategic priorities are supported by a number of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely objectives.

In developing a set of strategic housing priorities for Northampton we have conducted a thorough analysis of our environment and options, and have worked with a set of guiding principles:

- Taking all available opportunities to increase the supply of decent affordable homes across all tenures.
- Working to ensure that all homes are “decent” across all tenures.
- Working to improve the housing service, especially those aspects of it which are poor.
- Supporting the development of sustainable communities which will take Northampton into the future as a vibrant and successful town which is part of the greater South East.

3.2.2 Increase the Supply of Affordable Housing

- The Northampton Borough Council Housing Market and Needs Study estimates a net affordable housing requirement annually of 1,185, based upon total estimated need of 4,135, against a supply of 2,950 affordable homes from various sources.
- This *affordability* requirement of 1,185 is set against a background of 1,350 recorded completions during 2004/2005 (i.e. 87% of total completions).
- Northampton is a growth area with high population increases planned.
- The Council must enable and support a step change in housing completions in order to meet the targets set by the Milton Keynes South Midlands strategy (30,000 new homes by 2021).
- The number of affordable homes available to households in need has been reducing through right to buy.
- We are unable to finance the number of new affordable homes needed from our own resources. We will set a target of 35% affordable housing provision on all Section 106 sites.

- Even though Northampton is seen as a cheaper place to live in the south east, an increasing proportion of the local community cannot afford to access the housing market.
- The number of households registered in need has increased to 5,355 in 2006 (Housing Market and Needs Study).
- We have seen an increase in statutory overcrowding in our council stock and also an increase in applications from private rented sector tenants who are applying for social housing due to overcrowding in their existing homes.
- Evidence suggests that home ownership is the aspirational tenure of choice for most households.

3.2.3 *Create sustainable communities*

- The Northampton Borough Council Community Strategy aims to “regenerate the poorest areas of the town through supporting community based economic development” and “to develop a prosperous, vibrant, safe and attractive town centre”.
- This priority supports the Northamptonshire Local Area Agreement (LAA) with its four blocks of: Safer and stronger communities; economic development, enterprise and growth; children and young people; healthier communities and older people. It will support the delivery of the LAA targets. The economic development, enterprise and growth block is the relevant block for this Housing Strategy
- The potential for growth arising from the Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub-regional strategy means that it is vital that we secure investment in infrastructure – roads, transport and community infrastructure and the integration of new people and communities into our town.
- Northampton Borough Council Anti-social Behaviour Strategy: *Working with partners to reduce crime and disorder across Northampton.*
- Northampton is in a growth area with high population increases expected.
- 34,341 people in 9 wards in Northampton live in SOAs (Super Output Areas) that are in the most deprived 20% in the country.

3.2.4 *Improve the Housing Service*

- Audit Commission Inspection 2005 – One Star.
- As a council rated as poor, we must focus upon improving the weakest services.
- Stock retention is currently the favoured option for our council housing stock therefore a full and efficient landlord service is required.

3.2.5 *Provide support to the most vulnerable people*

- Supports the Northampton Community Strategy aims to “help to develop and provide care and support to meet the needs and choices of all sectors of the community”.
- Supporting people.
- Elderly people – the elderly population is projected to increase.
- Homelessness.

3.2.6 *Meet the Decent Homes Standard*

- Stock retention is currently the favoured option for the Council.
- The Council therefore needs to bring its own housing stock up to DHS by 2010.
- The Stock Condition Survey shows that 20% of the stock does not meet the standard.
- The Council also has to meet the DHS in the Private Sector.

4 HOW DO WE GET THERE?

4.1 Resources

4.1.1 Introduction

We are currently developing an Asset Management Plan and a Corporate Capital Strategy, both of which will impact on the housing strategy. We have put the staff resources in place to develop and deliver the housing strategy, which includes the creation of a Regeneration and Growth corporate area that includes a housing strategy and enabling team.

We work to identify all potential sources of capital finance to maximise investment. Potential sources include Supported Borrowing, Unsupported Borrowing, Capital Receipts, Disabled Facilities Grant and Major Repairs Allowance. The use of borrowing to finance the HRA Capital Programme will need to be re-assessed in the light of the revised Housing Revenue Account business plan. The government also provides grants for specific purposes such as electronic government, and improvement of the benefits system. We make use of our powers under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in pursuit of our priorities.

West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) is the local planning authority for all housing sites in the town centre and sites over 50 units elsewhere. We will be working with WNDC to use their powers under Section 106 on these sites.

We need to ensure that resources are maximised to support housing strategic objectives, and this includes use of the above and further external funding.

4.1.2 Capital resources

Capital resources to help fund housing investment consist of the HRA Capital Programme and elements from the General Fund capital programme. The HRA Capital Programme 2006/7 amounts to £9.6m with £3.1m now allocated to voids repairs. A draft programme for 2007/8 onwards has been prepared which shows indicative levels of capital expenditure which are expected to be achievable each year. Total annual programme is around £9.6m over years 2007/8 - 2009/10 with a focus on voids repairs, disabled adaptations, re-roofing, appliance replacement and re-wiring. There is a capital budget of £4.6m in 2007/8, £5.3m in 2008/9 and £6m in 2009/10 which has not been allocated to specific schemes. The detail of this element of the HRA capital programme will be informed by the stock condition survey and the Decent Homes Standard. Private Sector Housing Capital Schemes currently total £1.6m for 2006/7 with £1.6m budgeted for 2007/8, targeted at the delivery of

Decent Homes in the private sector, Disabled Facilities Grants and Renovation Grants.

The following table outlines the resources available in developing the housing strategy.

Options for inward investment	Priorities for resources
Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme	Housing Corporation's investment priorities
East Midlands Regional Housing Strategy Single Capital Pot	Regional Housing Strategy Priorities
Provision of land for affordable housing development including releasing land for housing purposes and securing Section 106 agreements. WNDL is the planning authority for town centre sites and others over 50 units	Housing Corporation priorities Local priorities
Maximise number of private sector empty properties brought back into use	Support priorities in Council's Empty Homes Strategy
Reduce council and RSL voids and re-let times	Choice-based letting
RSLs debt-finance developments, whether linked to Section 106 discounted package deals, SHG gap funding or beneficial land deals	Any new residential sites where a need for affordable housing provision is identified
Investment funding in local authority stock through use of MRA, HRA, capital receipts and the single capital pot.	Improving local authority stock and bringing empty properties back into use

4.1.3 *Asset Management*

Savills have been commissioned to update our existing stock condition information and to prepare an Asset Management Strategy for the Council owned housing stock which will enable a robust options appraisal to be undertaken. The Asset Management Strategy information will be published during 2007/2008 and will require a consequential review of the Housing Strategy and the 2007/2008 Action Plan. It will look to categorise our Council owned housing into:

- Retain and invest
- Dispose of most problematic stock
- Dispose of most valuable to cross-subsidise

- Dispose to increase management efficiency.

The strategy will be developed within the context of Northampton having undertaken an earlier option appraisal to retain our housing stock. The completed data will be ready during 2007/2008.

4.1.4 *Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Determination*

The HRA subsidy budget is based on a determination received from DCLG. The negative subsidy entitlement (meaning NBC makes a payment to the Government) has increased from £7.1m in 2006/07 to £8.7m in 2007/08, an increase of £1.6m. The guideline rent has increased by £2.1m while the estimated actual rent will increase by £1.4m. The maintenance allowance for 2007-08 is £1,038.09 per property (2006-07 £964.20). The management allowance for 2007-08 is £508.04 per property (2006-07 £477.60).

4.1.5 *Housing Corporation National Affordable Housing Programme and Single Housing Pot*

The East Midlands region has a National Affordable Housing Programme which is expected to deliver around 5,300 new homes with around £166 million of grant money. In terms of grant allocation for Northampton schemes, the Housing Corporation allocated just over £20 million for the delivery of over 500 new affordable homes between 2006/08. The Council is currently liaising with the Registered Social Landlords who are delivering the homes to ensure there is a smooth, structured delivery for the Programme.

4.1.6 *Use of Section 106 Agreements for Affordable Housing*

We will continue to monitor the delivery of affordable housing through the planning system. West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) has established several Infrastructure sub-group which feed into the Growth Delivery Plan, one of which will focus upon housing. This sub-group aims to develop a definition of affordable housing and a uniform approach.

In partnership with WNDC (the development control authority) we will develop new Local Development Documents to maximise the opportunities presented by the new policy guidance in PPS3 *and Delivering Affordable Housing*.

We will:

- Continue to work closely with WNDC and our Local Authority partners to ensure the consistent delivery of affordable housing targets within Northampton and across West Northamptonshire.
- Ensure that an appropriate range of affordable housing options and models is offered, creating genuine housing choice

- Ensure affordable housing is delivered and managed in such a way as to create balanced, mixed tenured communities.

Following the completion of a local Housing Needs Study in October 2006 and the Housing Market Assessment in December 2006, we will commence preparation of a new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for securing affordable housing. Public consultation is scheduled for September 2007 and adoption of the SPD in December 2007. This SPD will eventually supplement a new policy framework to be published in the Core Spatial Strategy for West Northamptonshire, but will act to deliver current saved policies in the Structure Plan and Local Plan.

4.1.7 *Use of Section 106 Agreements for Physical and Social Infrastructure Costs*

Provision of both social and physical infrastructure is essential in order to deliver sustainable growth and therefore improving the approach to funding and delivery of key infrastructure is being explored in the growth areas.

We will support the continuing development of this work, through the pooling of developer contributions, calculating strategic and local infrastructure requirements and supporting the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation as the strategic development control authority and as managers of the process. The process which will produce a set of standard “charges” which will apply to each development dependant on its type, and will both streamline the present system and seek to ensure consistency and enhance the funding stream for new infrastructure. We will ensure that the requirement for affordable housing, which is often a key factor in the viability and deliverability of schemes, is fully taken into account in the new system.

There is a likelihood of a “scaling back” in the use of Section 106 Agreements to fund physical and social infrastructure. We expect that they will be replaced by Planning Gain Supplements as suggested in the Barker Review of Housing and DCLG consultations.

4.1.8 *Land Availability*

This Strategy may be supported by using appropriate, Council-owned land to facilitate the delivery of affordable housing. Consistent with the new guidance contained within PPS3, we will give consideration to opportunities for affordable housing provision on surplus public sector land. This can be used as a lever to attract funding as the Housing Corporation are more likely to fund schemes where land is provided at a discount. We are currently working on an Asset Disposal Strategy which will include a set of criteria which

can be used to judge projects in order to recommend whether or not they can be transferred to a non-profit organisation at a discount or nil consideration.

We are well placed in terms of land supply suitable for development within Northampton. We transferred our residential land holdings to English Partnerships, and have set up a joint Brownfield Initiative Board. We await the publication of the National Brownfield Strategy early in 2007, and will respond proactively.

We are also developing our Corporate Capital Strategy. In draft this recognises the importance of the role of housing to us. A set of draft criteria is currently being prepared to determine how future Council funds are allocated.

4.2 Options Appraisal

4.2.1 Introduction

We have taken a thorough and robust approach to analysing the options available to us both in developing the strategic priorities, and then in terms of our options for meeting those strategic priorities.

The key issues were:

- Does the option fit well with the strategic context?
- Do stakeholders understand and agree with the options?
- Do we have the resources and/or enablers to deliver or support delivery of the option?

4.2.2 Review of Progress Against Existing Commitments

Progress in terms of existing commitments is set out in Appendix 4. Progress has been good in some areas, but has been hindered by lack of resources in others in the earlier stages of the last housing strategy. Most resources are now in place and progress has been made, particularly in terms of homelessness, income management, commissioning research and the delivery of affordable homes.

We considered progress against existing commitments, and the need to carry forward some outstanding objectives and actions when appraising the options for objectives for this strategy.

4.2.3 Clarification of Resources Issues

We have invested considerable resources in the development of this strategy and in the appraisal of the options available to us to support achievement of the strategic priorities. We have worked with colleagues across the Council and within our partner

organisations such as WNDC to ensure we have a comprehensive understanding of the resources available to us.

We have ensured that where an objective has been agreed, and an action plan developed to achieve it, that we have the resources available to deliver on that objective. We will seek to raise funds to achieve those objectives which are beyond our resource capacity, but where there are external funds available to us to deliver.

4.2.4 *Selection of Options*

This Strategy forms part of an on-going process of strategic development and change within the Council. It builds on a number of decisions which we have made, and policy changes introduced by Government, over the last two years. Most significant amongst these are:

- The decision in 2005 to pursue a strategy based on retention of our housing stock.
- Our ineligibility to apply for Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) status for the stock.
- Inclusion of Northampton within the Milton Keynes South Midlands Growth Zone.
- Establishment of one core spatial strategy covering the administrative areas of Northampton Borough, Daventry District and South Northamptonshire Councils.
- Establishment of the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation.

We selected options and are subjecting them to a rigorous Options Appraisal process. The results of this process are set out below.

4.2.5 *Conclusions of Options Appraisal*

We have determined our strategic objectives based upon their fit with our strategic priorities and with the environmental analysis of the context in which we work. We have considered issues such as the maximisation of resources and the capacity to provide a better service or product for our customers, as well as scenario considerations of not undertaking certain objectives at all.

The resulting set of objectives will feed into the action planning process for 2007/2008 which will support achievement of our strategic priorities.

4.3 Delivery

4.3.1 *Introduction*

Our strategic priorities complement our housing vision and are the aspirational goals for Northampton's housing. The objectives and Action Plan for 2007/2008 are our battle plan which will deliver the

strategic priorities. These are challenging but achievable for the Council, and they will guide us in monitoring progress and performance.

We will monitor and support delivery of the action plan and strategic priorities by:

- The Housing Strategy Steering Panel and Board will monitor achievements on a quarterly basis
- The council will target available resources to progress strategic housing priorities
- We will continue to build upon our strategic improvement plan to ensure we are providing cost-effective and customer-focussed service.

We summarise below the key objectives and delivery priorities for each of the strategic priorities. They are set out in more detail in the Action Plan at Section 5..

4.3.2 *Increase the Supply of Affordable Housing*

We will:

- Widen the opportunities to home ownership and improve the quantity, quality and choice of rental accommodation.
- Support the completion of 1450 new homes annually 2006 – 2011 (MKSM) by maximising inward investment, by working with all our partners to plan for growth and by selling land to facilitate new development.
- Continuously review the use of Section 106 agreements to make best use of the opportunities presented to us by PPS3
- Agree a new Section 106 policy and standard terms with WNDK in light of their development control role.
- Develop an Asset Disposal Strategy to support provision of affordable housing on Council-owned sites.
- Support the development of brownfield sites

4.3.3 *Create sustainable communities*

We will:

- Contribute to regeneration initiatives that will revive the most deprived neighbourhoods.
- Maximise the role of RSLs in developing communities.
- Secure investment in community infrastructure to support the integration of new people and communities into our town.
- Support the development of mixed tenure and mixed income communities.
- We will develop a policy in the Local Development Framework that all new housing must achieve Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3, with an aspiration towards Level 6, using our experience at Upton as an exemplar neighbourhood.

4.3.4 *Improve the Housing Service*

We will:

- Work to reduce homelessness by providing excellent advice services and assistance and by working in partnership.
- Produce a Homelessness Strategy highlighting the need for affordable housing solutions. The Strategy will cover pathways, rough sleepers, assessment and referral, and housing benefits.
- Ensure vulnerable groups have access to services to provide access to suitable accommodation and housing related support.
- Continue to reduce void levels and the time taken to relet empty properties in our council-owned stock.
- Take direct action to deal with the other weak housing service services.

4.3.5 *Provide support to the most vulnerable people*

We will:

- Ensure vulnerable groups have access to suitable accommodation and housing related support, by working in partnership with providers and alongside the Supporting People Strategy to develop positive outcomes.
- Reduce homelessness, through an emphasis on preventative measures.
- Set up a County wide supported housing working group to address priorities in the Supporting People Strategy.
- Reflect the needs of vulnerable groups such as young people, travellers, people with disabilities and people fleeing violence.
- Create a sustainable environment where the rights and responsibilities of both travellers and the settled community are respected, by developing legitimate sites for travellers.
- Take action to enable vulnerable home owners to remain in their own homes, e.g. by providing maintenance grants or disabled adaptations, or by the provision of appropriate advice.

4.3.6 *Meet the Decent Homes Standard*

We will:

- Develop and implement the asset management strategy, and the Decent Homes Standard Implementation Plan.
- Facilitate achievement of Decent Homes Standard in the private sector by home owners by 2012, by reviewing eligibility criteria for grants and secure improvement to homes in the private sector which are unfit or in poor repair for vulnerable households.

- Improve energy efficiency across all tenures, e.g. by developing a fuel poverty strategy and/or promoting grants and initiatives for owner-occupiers to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

4.3.7 *Implementation*

The Action Plan at Section 5 outlines the work that is proposed for 2007/08. This Action Plan will be subject to revisions through the consultation period particularly in the context of audit commission inspection and stakeholder views.

Implementation is a key focus of the housing strategy given concerns over delivery in previous years. This Action Plan is subject to continuous monitoring and review.

4.3.8 *How will we monitor our performance?*

The Housing Strategy Board and Steering Panel will remain as standing groups after this Housing Strategy is approved and attains Fit for Purpose Status. The Housing Strategy Board will be renamed the Strategic Housing Monitoring Group (SHMG), and the Steering Panel will become the Strategic Housing Partnership (SHP). They will each meet quarterly to review progress against the action plans, to review strategic priorities and to support decision-making. They will undertake a review and reforecast exercise on a half-yearly cycle throughout the life of this strategy. The review and reforecast will consider progress to date against the strategy, and a reforecast of achievements to the next half-year point. It will also consider other corporate strategies or priorities which have arisen to ensure the housing strategy maintains alignment and integration with the wider Council agenda. The Government Office for the East Midlands will be invited to attend alternate meetings of the Strategic Housing Partnership.

The SHMG will also ensure that the recommendations of the SHP are implemented and to provide corporate working particularly in the context of housing responsibilities divided over a number of key corporate areas.

4.3.9 *How Northampton monitors performance*

We monitor our performance against statutory BVPIs and national targets, together with locally defined indicators specific to each service area. In April 2006 we increased the number local indicators to inform the public and managers more about the quality of services we provide.

Our priorities are outlined in the Corporate Plan, the Service Improvement Plan, and the supporting Improvement Delivery Plan.

Our performance management framework has the following elements:

- Weekly team meetings in each service area
- Monthly reporting by Service Areas on Relevant Targets, Projects and Actions
- Analysis of Performance at Improvement Board
- Quarterly Performance Reviews
- Service Review Programme
- Corporate Appraisal Scheme

The Housing Strategy is further strengthened by the Housing Strategy Steering Panel and the Housing Strategy Project Board.

4.4 Conclusions

4.4.1 The housing “scene” is changing rapidly in Northampton. This Strategy aims to:

- Meet the challenges flowing from those changes
- Make the most of the opportunities presented by them
- Secure resources to deliver our strategic priorities
- Establish systems to ensure that they are delivered.

4.4.2 We hope that you agree with our Vision, our strategic priorities, our objectives and proposals for implementation of the Strategy.

5. ACTION PLAN FOR 2007/2008

1 Increase the supply of affordable housing

Options for Objectives	Measure/Action	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
1.1 Provide council owned land or assets to support new affordable housing development, and retain a strategic management role to facilitate the provision of affordable housing, e.g. by retaining nomination rights.	Measure – the number of affordable housing schemes enabled through provision of land. Action – research the feasibility of providing capital grant to RSLs from S106 monies to provide affordable housing.	April 2007	S. Pointer	March 2008	Housing Strategy and Enabling Team
1.2 Ensure 35% requirement of affordable homes on new developments from April 2007 for the life of this strategy by reviewing the arrangements for delivering affordable housing.	Action – review Section 106 Affordable Housing policy. Action – with WNDCCdevelop new fit for purpose Section 106 policy Action – investigate impact of WNDCC as development control Measure the number of affordable homes achieved through Section 106 agreements	January 2007	S. Pointer	March 2007	Planning Policy, and Housing Strategy and Enabling Teams
1.3 Support the completion of 1450 new homes annually 2006 – 2011 (MKSM) by maximising inward investment and by working with all our partners to plan for growth	Action – develop partnership working to plan for growth Measure - Number of annual completions on new homes. Measure -Year end performance	Ongoing	S. Pointer	Annual returns	Housing Strategy and Enabling Team/WNDCC

Options for Objectives	Measure/Action	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
1.5 Widen the opportunities to home ownership	Measure - Reduce the percentage to 30% of the affordable units on new schemes. (Large number of Homebuy properties currently being developed by RSLs) Action - Investigate the introduction of Social Homebuy for Northampton Borough Council tenants	June 2007	S. Pointer	August 2007	Housing Strategy and Enabling Team
1.6 Ensure supply of affordable housing addresses need for affordable housing as regards mix of type and size. Draft HMA recommends that 25% of all new housing is social rented and suggests analysis of need from housing register to determine type of properties required	Action – implementation of 70% rented and 30% shared ownership split for new affordable housing schemes Action - Analyse Housing Register figures to develop guidelines and/or targets for the best mix of size on developments Measure - Reduction in number of people on Housing Register	April 2007	S. Pointer	March 2008	Housing Strategy and Enabling Team
1.7 Maximising inward investment to develop affordable housing across all tenures by maximising bids to local, regional and national bodies to fund new homes	Action Carry out research into range of grant availability in relation to affordable and market housing Measure – inward investment increased	February 2007	S. Pointer	June 2007	Housing Strategy and Enabling Team
1.8 Make best use of the resource implied by under-occupation in the council stock by taking action to reduce under-occupation, for example by introducing incentives to move including type of move-on property available which may require revision of allocations procedures	Action Completion of research into this activity Action – establish a working group to develop proposals to act upon the research findings Measure – increase in number of under occupied properties available for re-letting	October 2007	S. Pointer	March 2008	Housing Strategy and Enabling Team, and Housing Services

Options for Objectives	Measure/Action	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
1.9 Work with the housing service to reduce the length of time properties are void	Measure -Reduction in the average time taken to re-let a Council property	Ongoing	R. Fitzhenry	March 2007, and ongoing	Property Maintenance Services
1.10 Investigate ways to bring empty private and commercial properties back into use to meet affordable housing needs	Action - Investigate possibility of CPOs and then transferring the properties to RSLs	To be advised	S. Eley	To be advised	Private Sector Housing Service
1.11 Develop and implement an asset management strategy, which will identify council-owned buildings suitable for sale or conversion to residential	<p>Action - Completion of an Asset Management Strategy</p> <p>Action – review this objective and associated actions when the Asset Management Strategy is completed</p> <p>Action – develop systems for monitoring and review of Asset Management Strategy once implemented</p> <p>Action – Investigate the effectiveness of transferring land and assets at nil value to RSLs in order to provide more affordable housing</p> <p>Action - Disposal Strategy Plan (Housing) is tackling domestic properties and garages</p>	Ongoing	S.Dougall	To be advised	Estates

Options for Objectives	Measure/Action	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
1.12 Develop targets for energy efficiency in new affordable homes	Action Work towards attaining Housing Corporation Standards on all affordable units Currently Eco Homes 'very good' Develop a policy in the Local Development Framework that all new housing must achieve Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3, with an aspiration towards Level 6	March 2007	S. Pointer	Ongoing	Housing Strategy & Enabling Team
1.13 Set appropriate design guidance for the development of new affordable homes	Action – Work towards attaining Housing Corporation Scheme Development Standards on all affordable units	March 2007	S. Pointer	Ongoing	Housing Strategy and Enabling Team
1.15 Support the development of environmentally friendly and sustainable homes on new development	Action - Introduce a requirement that all new properties must attain Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes	March 2007	S. Pointer	Ongoing	Planning Policy and Housing Strategy and Enabling Teams
1.16 Influence early infrastructure contributions by working with WNDC on infrastructure interest area sub-groups, and the viability of a roof tariff as an alternative to PGS	Action - Involvement in the WNDC Growth Delivery Plan Steering Group Infrastructure Sub-Groups	Ongoing	C. Cavanagh	To be determined	Regeneration and Growth Corporate Area/Housing Strategy and Enabling Team
1.17 Examine the possibility of flexibility for affordability on larger sites to compensate for the higher implied tax burden on the development of smaller brownfield sites	Action - Review of Supplementary Planning Guidance subject to outcomes of revised monitoring arrangements which will demonstrate whether there is a need for this	March 2007	S. Pointer	December 2007	Planning Policy, and Housing Strategy and Enabling

Options for Objectives	Measure/Action	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
1.18 Agree new Section 106 policy and standard terms with WNDC in light of their development control role.	Action – Development and agreement of new policy, following consideration with partners	February 2007	C. Cavanagh and C Stevenson	April 2008 (provisional)	To be determined
1.169 Work with our RSL partners to ensure that recycled capital grant is used within Northampton	Action -Work with RSLs to ensure that recycled capital grant is used within Northampton. Measure -Amount of grant recycled and new affordable homes developed.	October 2007	S. Pointer	Ongoing	Housing Strategy and Enabling Team

2 Create sustainable communities

Options for Objectives	Measure	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
2.1 Plan for the Renaissance of the town centre (MKSM)	Action - Agreement of Central Area Action Plan	Ongoing	S.Pointer/Regeneration Manager	CAAP – estimated completion 2009	Regeneration & Growth; Partnership Working
2.2 Contribute to regeneration initiatives that will revive the most deprived neighbourhoods	Action - Neighbourhood Management/CASPAR + initiatives	Ongoing Programme CASPAR +	Regeneration Manager	March 2008	Multi-Agency CASPAR+ Neighbourhood Renewal funding £4 million for next four years (Spring Boroughs)
2.3 Maximise the role of RSLs in developing communities. Evaluate RSLs practice and performance. Ensure 100% nomination rights are achieved on new schemes and agreed percentage thereafter.	Action - produce an action plan for this objective following consideration at RSL housing management group,	March 2007	S. Pointer	March 2008	RSL Management Group
2.4 Support crime and anti-social behaviour reduction	Action - Partnership working with the Northants Hate Crimes Unit CASPAR+ Neighbourhood Renewal funding expenditure (Spring Boroughs Anti-Social Behaviour Unit work/Action Plan Northampton Borough Council Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy Action – maintain an effective PR and Communications Strategy	Ongoing	T. Ansell	March 2008	Home Office Funding – Respect Agenda

Options for Objectives	Measure	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
2.5 Secure investment in community infrastructure to support the integration of new people and communities into our town	Action – Secure agreement for Neighbourhood Management structures, and subsequent implementation plan	Ongoing	S. Silver and J. Tinker	March 2007 for Structure	Local Strategic Partnership, multi-agency synergies
2.6 Confirm the strong emphasis of neighbourhood management on our estates	Action - Consider the role of neighbourhood management areas in the context of the housing landlord service	To be determined	T. Ansell	March 2008	Housing landlord service; tenant representatives
2.7 Develop tenant participation strategy	Action - Tenant Participation Strategy adopted Dec 2006 to be implemented	Ongoing	S. Silver	December 2007	Tenant representatives, Community Development Team
2.8 Support the development of mixed tenure and mixed income communities	Action - Implementation of 70% rent and 30% shared ownership (following HMA report)	February 2007	S. Pointer	March 2008	Housing Strategy and Enabling Team
2.9 Support the development of brownfield sites	Measure - Percentage of brownfield developments	Ongoing	S. Pointer	Ongoing – Year end figures	Planning Policy

3 Improve the Housing Service

Options for Objectives	Measure	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
3.1 Work to prevent homelessness by providing excellent advice services and assistance and by working in partnership	Measure - Reduction in number of homeless cases made and accepted Action - Development of a robust and effective homeless strategy	Ongoing – Quarterly improvements in place. Ongoing	M. Spencer	Quarterly reporting from 31 March 2007. December 2007	Homeless Team and Housing Advice; partnership working
3.2 Ensure vulnerable groups have access to services to provide access to suitable accommodation and housing related support	Action - Re-launch of Supported Housing Group. Action - Identification of priority groups in order to target resources	March 2007	S. Pointer	April 2007	Northampton Borough Council Corporate Working
3.3 Work to reduce the amount of time properties are void to maximise use of available resources	Measure - Reduction in the amount of time taken to re-let empty Council properties	Ongoing - Voids Project Manager appointed	R. Fitzhenry & T. Ansell	Annual target – March 2007, and ongoing	Housing Services and Property Maintenance
3.4 Work to improve the revenues and benefits performance, e.g. by reviewing staffing structures, policies and procedures and working practices	Measure - An improved customer service in Housing Benefit Claims	Ongoing	I. Tyrer	November 2006, and monthly	Housing Benefits and Customer Services
3.5 Implement and monitor the Housing Action Plan which sets the priorities for improving the housing service	Action - To produce a revised Housing Improvement Plan following the Audit Commission 'Light Touch' housing inspection of September 2006 Measure - Month on month improvement in housing VIPs performance	November 2006 for report production – phased implementation	F. Rodgers	Monthly targets to be monitored	Corporate, and tenant representatives
3.6 Use choice-based lettings to increase accessibility	Action - To produce an Action Plan for the implementation of Choice-Based Lettings Action - To implement Choice-Based Lettings	October 2006 November 2006	M. Spencer/Alison Hacking	Complete Pilot May 2008	Housing Services, RSL Management Group

Options for Objectives	Measure	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
3.7 Upgrade IT systems to provide more improved services to customers	Action - Introduction of integrated Housing IT system (IBS)	Module implementation from March 2007,	P. Nock	Full implementation by July 2007	Corporate
3.8 Undertake tenant satisfaction survey to ascertain our customer needs, and to ensure that customer feedback is recorded, reported and used to inform service delivery.	Action - To complete a STATUS tenant satisfaction survey Improved BVPI 74 & 75 scores – tenant satisfaction with landlord service, and opportunities for participation in the housing service	November 2007	I. Mortimer	March 2007	Housing Services
3.9 Communicate more effectively with customers	Measure - Target for answering calls through new Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) Service 96% Target for Grade of Service 80% Review access to services Target for waiting time, One Stop Shop 90% of customers wait less than 20 minutes Qualitative performance assessment framework for customer services officers – 90% to achieve this standard	Ongoing	C. Doran	March 2007 March 2007 March 2008	New systems, Customer Services Team
3.10 Improve telephone contact for housing services	Action - Implementation of Phase 3 of the contact centre	Ongoing	C. Doran	March 2007	As above

Options for Objectives	Measure	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
3.11 Improve telephone contact for Housing Benefits service	<p>Action and Measure - Ensure waiting times hit interim targets – 50% of calls to be answered within 15 seconds, and 85% calls answered overall</p> <p>Final targets – 80% of calls answered within 15 seconds and 96% overall</p>	Ongoing	C. Doran	<p>March 2007, and regular monitoring</p> <p>September 2007</p>	As above
3.12 Ensure mutual exchange information is accessible to customers	Action – ensure mutual exchange information is available on the Northampton Council website	July 2006	C. Doran	April 2007	Customer Services Team

4 Provide support to vulnerable people

Options for Objectives	Measure	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
4.1 Ensure vulnerable groups have access to suitable accommodation and housing related support, by working in partnership with providers and alongside the Supporting People Strategy to develop positive outcomes	Action - Set up of Countywide Supported Housing Group <i>In order</i> to identify priority groups and their different needs	March 2007	S. Pointer	To be advised	Cross-authority pooling of resources
4.2 Create a sustainable environment where the rights and responsibilities of both Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community are respected, by developing authorised sites for travellers	Action - Countywide Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment commissioned in January 2007 which will feed into a Gypsy and Traveller Strategy Action - Production of Gypsy and Traveller Strategy	Feb 2007 January 2008	S. Pointer	December 2007 June 2008	Countywide Travellers Unit, cross-authority working.
4.3 Work in partnership to prevent homelessness, for example by working with private sector landlords to enable homeless households to access private rented accommodation	Measure - Number of additional units provided	Ongoing	M. Spencer	March 2008	Partnership working, voluntary sector, Private Sector Housing Team
4.4 Reduce reliance on temporary accommodation by supporting the provision of more secure accommodation by 2008	Measure - Number of people using temporary accommodation	Quarterly monitoring	M. Spencer	Quarterly monitoring	Partnership Working
4.5 Action to enable vulnerable home owners to remain in their own homes, e.g. by providing maintenance grants or disabled adaptations, or by the provision of appropriate advice	Action - Development of Equity Release Scheme	July 2007	S. Eley	March 2008	Income maximization, advice, Private Sector Housing
4.7 Develop more and improved supported accommodation e.g. for adults with learning disabilities and/or teenage parents	Action - Priority groups and needs identified	February 2007	S. Pointer	December 2007	Supported Housing Group, Supporting People

Options for Objectives	Measure	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
4.8 Strengthen protocols for provision of support to vulnerable groups	Action - Completion of Process Mapping Exercise	May 2007	S. Pointer	January 2008	As above
4.9 Dealing effectively with racial harassment	Measure - BVPI 164 – Equal access to social housing Measure - BVPI 175 – Racial incidents resulting in further action	July 2007	S. Pointer	March 2008	Corporate working, and partnership & community involvement
4.10 Production of a BME Housing Strategy	Action - Completion of Strategy	Nov 2006	S. Pointer	July 2007	Corporate working and partnership & community involvement

5 Meet the Decent Homes Standard

Options for Objectives	Measure/Action	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
5.1 Achieve Decent Homes Standard in the council stock by 2010	Action – achieve full spend of the Annual Capital Programme for the life of this strategy Measure - Total Council homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard (Currently 30% achieved)	Ongoing	R. Fitzhenry	Achieve by 2010 – yearly targets to be identified following asset management plan & strategic investment plan – project plan on site, delivery to start July 2007	MRA, Capital Investment, Efficiency savings, partnering arrangements
5.2 Develop and implement asset management strategy, and Decent Homes Standard Implementation Plan	Action - Production of an Asset Management Strategy for the Council's housing stock	Ongoing	R. Fitzhenry	Date to be confirmed	To be advised, but links to above
5.3* Support achievement of Decent Homes Standard in the private sector by 2010 e.g. by reviewing eligibility criteria for grants	Action – achieve full spend of available capital programme annually for the life of this strategy. Measure – increased percentage of vulnerable private sector homes meeting decency target by 2010	Ongoing	S. Eley	2010 – with annual monitoring	Private Sector grants
5.4* Secure improvement to homes in the private sector which are unfit or in poor repair	Action - Implementation of private sector renewal strategy	To follow private sector stock condition survey	S. Eley	(May 2008 for strategy implementation)	To be developed

Options for Objectives	Measure/Action	Start Date	Responsible Officer	Completion Date	Resources
5.5 Review renewal and regeneration strategies in the light of stock condition information	Action - Consideration by Knowledge and Information Management Group	April 2007 (for public sector)	S. Eley and S. Pointer	March 2008 (Prov.)	Housing Strategy and Enabling, and Private Sector Housing, and Property Maintenance
5.6* Enable vulnerable home owners to remain in their homes e.g. by investigating loans and equity schemes to enable vulnerable home owners to access funds to repair and renovate their homes	Action - Consideration by Knowledge and Information Management Group	February 2007	S. Eley and S. Pointer	June 2007	Housing Strategy and Enabling, and Private Sector Housing
5.7* Improve energy efficiency across all tenures, e.g. by promoting grants and initiatives for owner-occupiers to improve the energy efficiency of their homes	Measure - BVPI 63 – Energy Efficiency SAP Rating - Current performance 67	Targets 06/07 68 07/08 70 08/09 72 Jan 2007	S. Eley and R. Fitzhenry	Year End Figures	Private Sector programme
	Action - Two new team leaders to be recruited for gas and electrical services, who will produce strategy for energy efficiency in public sector following report by Savills and NBA consultants	Ongoing	R. Fitzhenry	March 2007	HRA
	Measure - Reduction in carbon emissions as part of the HECA requirements – no annual target	Ongoing	S. Eley	March 2007, and yearly	Private Sector programme