

Medway Housing Strategy

2008-11

Contents

Section		Page
	Foreword	3
1	About Medway	4
2	Vision and strategic aims	6
3	Understanding the housing market	10
4	Aim 1 - Maximise the supply of suitable and affordable housing and meet housing need	17
5	Aim 2 - Enable vulnerable people to live independent lives	22
6	Aim 3 - Improve the quality and energy efficient of housing	27
7	Aim 4 - Sustainable communities	30
8	Aim 5 - Better services	33
9	Resources	34
10	Managing delivery	37
	Glossary of terms	38

Foreword

A stronger approach to service planning within the housing services, alongside the developing challenges of balancing the growth agenda and responding to the needs of the existing community, has prompted a changed approach to the preparation and development of the housing strategy.

For the first time Medway has adopted a wider approach to the development of and articulation of its strategic vision and objectives for housing and related services. Whilst the housing strategy sets out the overarching objectives for the next three years and the longer term, more detailed targeted responses and actions are set out within the suite of eight sub-strategies that have been developed as part of the wider development of this strategy.

The process of developing the housing and sub-strategies has involved many people, communities and organisations – our partners. It has been informed by extensive housing needs, housing market and housing condition research. It has been developed in consultation with stakeholders, partners and the local community through the use of surveys, consultation events, workshops and drop in sessions and through existing forum such as the citizens panel, residents groups and client based groups.

The strategy makes reference throughout to the joint working arrangements between the Council and a vast array of partners. We would like to express our gratitude to these stakeholders. The commitment and innovation of agencies in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors, and the dedication and hard work of residents, have been invaluable in both the development and implementation of our strategic aims, and we are committed to maintaining these fruitful and creative relationships in the coming years.

About Medway

The place

Medway is a unique area in the heart of the Thames Gateway. One of the largest urban areas in the south-east outside London it is a national priority area for regeneration and growth. It is recognised at national level for its potential as the city for the Thames Gateway. Whilst 88% of the population lives in the main urban conurbations half of the land is rural with significant areas of the landscape environmentally protected.

Regeneration and growth

Following many years of planning the regeneration of Medway is now moving at pace. More than £120m of sustainable communities funding will help draw in more than £1billion of private sector investment transforming Medway over the coming 20 years bringing housing and jobs and investment in transport and community facilities. Medway Renaissance, a local regeneration partnership, set up by Medway council and funded by Government has established a delivery plan and has the lead role in major physical regeneration and development projects.

Regeneration is focusing on brownfield sites along the waterfront, the redevelopment of Chatham as Medway's city centre, development in Grain, Kingsnorth and Chattenden, as well as improvements to our existing town centres. Land clearance and flood defences on Rochester Riverside are now complete and the developer for the first phase in place with the first houses being built in early 2009. Development briefs are in place for all other major sites.

Medway faces a significant challenge in preparing for and achieving growth. The council is committed to working with the communities of Medway and partners to establish a realistic vision for growth. A key aim is to ensure that all communities, both existing and new ones, can benefit from growth, are well integrated, and have the necessary social infrastructure to be sustainable. These shared benefits are an essential ingredient for community cohesion in the growth areas.

As part of this it is the role of the housing strategy to help shape the places that people live in by giving clear messages and working in partnership to deliver agreed priorities. Well-designed, secure and comfortable housing, set in an attractive and safe neighbourhood environment, makes for healthy and cohesive communities.

The number of new dwellings Medway is required to provide is set out in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006 and the emerging south east plan. The

structure plan requires 11,500 dwellings (av. 766pa) for the period 2001 to 2016 and the draft south-east plan 16,300 dwellings (av. 815pa) for the period 2006-2026.

The people

Today's population of 250,000 is growing and predicted to rise to 300,000 in the next 20 years. Medway has a younger population profile than the national average but in line with national trends this is slowly changing with a predicted 75% growth in the over 60's by 2028 with implications for housing and related care and support services.

Single person households now make up a third of all households reflecting changes in family structure and an ageing population. Conversely the proportion of traditional family households has declined to 50% of all households although this is higher than in the rest of the south-east.

At 5.4 %¹ Medway's black and minority ethnic (BME) population is lower than the national average (8.7%) with those of Indian origin being the single largest group. The proportion in the school population rises to about 9%.

Some 15% of people describe themselves as having a limiting long term illness – lower than the national average of 18%. However, there was a significant increase of 53% between the 1991 and 2001 census.

Whilst Medway is not a deprived area overall it has some of the most affluent and some of the most deprived areas at ward level in the country.

¹ Medway Community Plan 2007-10

Vision and strategic aims

The following housing strategic aims set out the overall vision which the housing strategy aspires to deliver and which provides the focus of work over the next 3 years. These aims have been developed within the context of national and regional as well as local policies, plans and targets and a detailed understanding of local housing needs and aspirations. They are cross-cutting necessitating collaborative working across a range of partner organisations and services.

Aim 1 - Maximising the supply of suitable and affordable housing and meeting housing need

Aim 2 - Enabling vulnerable people to live independent lives

Aim 3 - Improving the quality and energy efficiency of homes

Aim 4 - Developing sustainable communities and promoting neighbourhood renewal

Aim 5 - Promoting better and fair access to housing services

This long-term vision will continue to build upon the achievements and 'work in progress' of the previous housing strategy

National priorities and targets

In 2003 the Government published the Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future, which has been followed by a series of documents including a five year plan for housing, and strategies for tackling homelessness, increasing housing supply and choice and improving the standard of housing in the private sector. These emphasise the central role that housing policy plays in helping develop sustainable communities.

The Government's housing related aims are to:

- Ensure that everyone has the opportunity to rent or buy a decent home at a price they can afford, in a place where they want to live and work
- Create attractive sustainable communities where people want to live and work.
- Enhance the conditions of vulnerable people's housing conditions and reduce the number of non-decent homes and reduce fuel poverty
- Tackle homelessness

Key national targets include:

- 3 million more homes by 2020 (with 2 million by 2016)
- 180,000 more affordable homes in next three years
- all new homes to be zero carbon from 2016
- 30% improvement in energy efficiency of homes by 2011
- all social housing to meet decent homes standards by 2010
- least 70% of vulnerable households in the private sector live in homes that are decent by 2010
- 50% reduction in the use of temporary accommodation by 2010
- Eliminate 'rough sleeping' by 2012
- Improving outcomes for children and young people
- Tackling financial and social exclusion and worklessness.

Regional priorities and targets

The Regional Housing Strategy (RHS) 2008-11 sets out the regional priorities and targets which local authority housing strategies will assist in delivering. It also guides housing investment allocation decisions. The regional strategy views the delivery of new affordable housing, particularly rented homes, as of overriding importance. As important is the need to ensure that the tenure mix reflects the requirements of the draft South East Plan – approximately 70% rented and 30% intermediate tenures. The strategy's priorities are to:

- Build more affordable homes
- Bring decent housing within reach of people on lower incomes
- Improve the quality of new housing and existing stock.

The Regional Housing Board has ensured stronger alignment of funding priorities with the 'South East Plan' and 'Regional Economic Strategy' strengthening the integration of housing, planning and economic development. Aligning funding streams more effectively to support delivery is a key objective of all regional partners.

Medway Community strategy and local area agreement (LAA)

The Community Strategy, developed by the local strategic partnership (LSP), is the key strategic planning document for the district. It identifies the top priorities for the area that key partners will work to address and expresses the commitment of the LSP to ensuring physical regeneration is accompanied by social and economic regeneration.

Responding to the changing face of Medway, the LSP is working towards a vision of Medway as a city of learning, culture, tourism and enterprise. This vision

has focused the development of the community strategy, the local area agreement (LAA) and the local outcomes and indicators within them.

The LAA is the delivery plan for the community strategy. It identifies those priorities and targets that most affect the lives of residents and looks to significantly raise performance through co-ordinated activity and partnership working. It is a three-year agreement between Medway Council, its partners, and the Government.

The LSP is moving forward with a stronger focus on making a difference and becoming the driving force behind real change in Medway. It has set challenging targets around five main priority issues:

- children and families
- a safer and stronger Medway
- health, wellbeing and older people
- economic development and skills
- regeneration, environment, culture and housing

The LAA contains three National Indicator targets that are specific to housing and this strategy:

- NI 154 The number of net additional homes provided
- NI 155 The number of affordable homes delivered
- NI 156 The number of households living in temporary accommodation

Corporate aims

The Council's core values are ***putting our customers at the centre of everything we do*** and ***giving value for money***. The corporate strategic priorities are to contribute towards;

- **A clean and green environment**
- **Safer communities**
- **Children and young people having the best start in life**
- **Older and Vulnerable people maintaining their independence**
- **Everyone benefiting from the area's regeneration**

Achieving the overall vision set out in this strategy will directly contribute towards achieving these corporate priorities and core values, by enabling all members of society to live in secure, safe, affordable housing located within sustainable communities.

Progress on the Housing Strategy 2005-07

Assessed as 'fit for purpose' by the Government Office for the South East of England the Housing Strategy 2005-07 provided a comprehensive detailed set of actions. Key achievements in the last three years include:

- In partnership securing increased housing corporation investment of £58.4m (2006/8) compared with £10.7m (2004/6)
- Adopting a new allocations policy
- Completion of housing needs, housing market and stock condition studies
- Improving the range of housing options and advice services
- Securing increased funding of £2.48m for private sector housing renewal
- Relocating the main housing contact point to a new central location in Chatham
- A reduction in the number of homeless applications from 1,232 (2005/6) to 380 (2007/8)
- A reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation from 629 at 31 December 2004 to 319 on the 31st March 2008.

Sub-regional Working

Medway is committed to working with sub-regional partners. Together we provide a stronger voice regionally to highlight the key issues for our communities and lobby for and attract investment. We achieve greater capacity by working jointly and pooling resources to deliver our strategic housing aims.

We have for a number of years worked as part of the North Kent Housing Partnership alongside Gravesham, Dartford and Swale Borough Councils, the Housing Corporation and local housing associations. Together we are committed to the delivery of new housing and community investment plans in North Kent and to work collaboratively.

More recently we have also been working as part of the West and North Kent Partnership successfully securing increased investment of to improve private sector housing condition over the next three years.

These partnerships not only seek an increase in resources but also create an opportunity for joint working at both a strategic and operational level, with many benefits including the sharing of good ideas and practice, consistent approaches to policy and service delivery and financial efficiency (for example through joint procurement of research).

Understanding the housing market

Current Economic Climate

Work understanding the housing market locally and nationally has developed over recent years, this has given us an understanding of trends, activity and its relationship to the local community. However, the current economic situation has meant that much of this has now changed. The effect of the downturn on the economy is having a dramatic effect on individuals and the wider economy. Whilst some work has been undertaken in trying to fully understand its effect, it is clear that the situation continues to develop.

These changes have led to the Council reviewing much of its information on how this has influenced the market and how this will effect both Medway and the wider area. To help achieve this and to help inform our reaction to the current situation we have jointly commissioned a Sub-regional Housing Market Assessment.

Activity within the market has slowed considerably and we are currently working with Swale, Gravesham, Dartford and Kent on the development of a new Sub-regional Multi Area Agreement, one of the main focuses of this is housing.

Whilst house prices have fallen the reduction has occurred slightly slower than in other areas, and prices having risen from those identified in the Housing Need Survey of 2006, have now fallen back to similar levels.

It is recognised that the full impact of the current situation has still to work through. The Strategic Housing Partnership have a role in monitoring the success of our strategy and both the partnership and the Council will continue to identify gaps and opportunities created by the conditions and will work to meet needs or exploit opportunities.

Housing Market

The 2005 strategic housing assessment (SHMA)² identified Medway as a distinct housing market area highly self-contained and with limited connectivity to the surrounding districts. The SHMA concluded this was due to the wide range of housing choice available to meet local need without the necessity for people to move across district boundaries.

² Medway Housing Market Assessment, DTZ Pieda, 2005

The 2006 housing needs survey³ provides a more detailed understanding of housing needs and aspirations and the operation of the local housing market.

Stock Profile

There are over 160,000 homes in Medway.

Tenure	%
Private Sector	86%
Social Housing	
- mhs homes	7%
- RSLs	4%
- Council	3%

Source HSSA 2008

At 14% Medway has a significantly lower proportion of affordable homes compared with 20% for similar unitary authorities and also in comparison with the south east region generally. This is significant given high levels of affordable housing need in Medway. By comparison with the region Medway has a lower proportion of private rented and a higher proportion of owner-occupied homes.

At 13.4% the percentage of flats in Medway is quite low compared to the national average of 20% but has been increasing recently and this trend is expected to continue.

Affordability

Average house prices in Medway rose by 119.8% between April 2000 and March 2008 – not dissimilar to the rest of Kent although average prices are lower in Medway. Access to owner occupation has been restricted by rising prices. An income of £25,900 p.a. is required to buy a one-bedroom flat in Chatham, £27,300 in Rochester and £26,800 in Gillingham. The housing needs survey findings indicate that 57.3% of new households have insufficient income to be able to buy on the open market.

Access to private renting is also restricted by price. Average rents for the small supply of one-bed flats are £362pcm and £480 for terraced houses. 56.3% of new households could afford a rent of no more than £350pcm; 30.1% a rent of no more than £260pcm.

The current economic downturn has brought reducing house prices but despite this affordability remains a significant issue as prices remain beyond the means of many. Access to home ownership is further compounded by difficulties in obtaining mortgages because of the 'credit crunch'.

³ Medway Housing Needs Survey, DCA, 2006

Housing need and demand

Market housing demand

The housing needs survey identified total demand of 18,365 for market housing over the following three years – 35% two bedroom and 40% three bedroom homes.

Affordable housing need

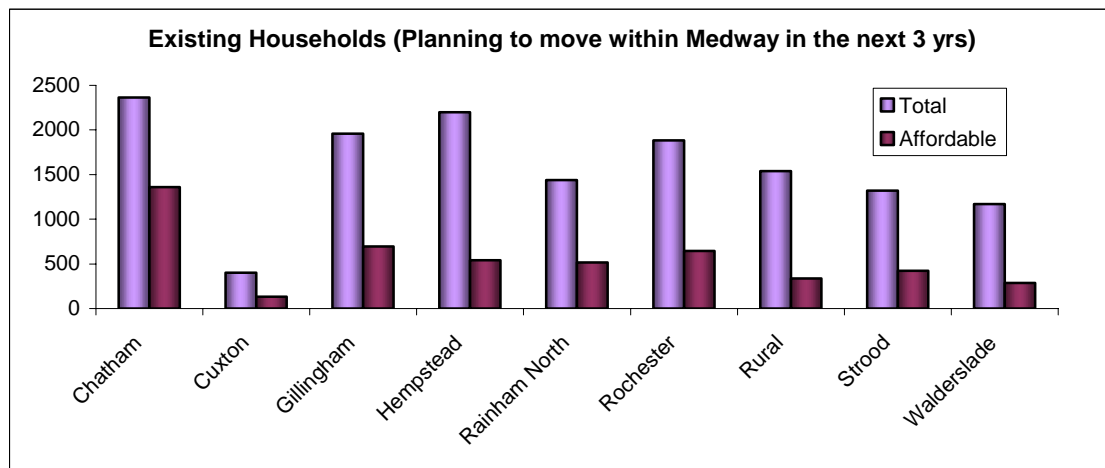
Medway has an acute shortage of affordable housing. The housing needs survey identified an annual net shortfall of 1281 affordable homes – ie after available accommodation (eg relets and new lettings) is taken into account.

Although high this figure is generally in line with levels of need in surrounding areas and comparable unitaries. The reasons are varied and include sub-standard and inappropriate accommodation, overcrowding, fuel poverty and affordability.

As a further indicator of need there were 7,629 households on the council's housing waiting list in May 2008. These households have varying levels of need - 719⁴ have been assessed as Band A and have the highest priority need for example because they live in unsatisfactory housing or need to move due to medical or welfare grounds. Need far outstrips supply with a total of 741 lets from the housing register in 2007/8.

The demand for affordable housing amongst existing households is mainly focused around Chatham with a high demand also within Rochester and Gillingham. The graph below shows the demand for housing by area for those households planning to move within Medway in the next three years.

Demand for housing by area using data from Housing Needs Survey 2006



⁴ Figures taken from Medway HomeChoice system May 2008

Despite the evidence of the scale of need there are also wider issues to consider when setting targets for the delivery of affordable housing from new developments, in particular the need for development to be viable and sustainable.

Housing needs of older people

The older population is increasing with the number of people over 60 years in Medway expected to grow by 75% between 2003 and 2028. The number of people over 85 years is expected to double. 61% of people with a disability are over 60 years. Older people are amongst the most vulnerable to the effects of excess cold and fuel poverty and non-decent homes.

The significant levels of growth in the older population in future will have a direct impact on the nature of their accommodation requirements and related care and support services. .

The housing needs survey identified a need for 1,929 units of sheltered housing over the next 3 years - 1,202 in the affordable sector and 727 in the private sector. Whilst some of this requirement will be addressed through relets the ability of the existing stock to meet today's standards and expectations will need to be considered in calculating the scale of new delivery.

The survey similarly identified a need for 327 extra care units over the next 3 years. Extra care housing provides extra support to enable older people to live as independently as possible and is primarily for those who are physically or mentally frail and need extra help to manage, and who might otherwise need residential or nursing care.

Supported housing needs

People with disabilities come across more barriers than most when accessing the housing market. They have to contend with issues such as affordability and supply of housing as well as its suitability.

The housing needs survey identified 21.5% of households in Medway include someone with a disability – almost 15% of these households include two people with disabilities. Whilst the majority of people with disabilities are aged over 60 years, over 20% are under the age of 25. The challenge is to support them and their families throughout childhood and then to help live independently as adults.

People with disabilities are more likely to be claiming income related benefits and generally have lower incomes and are more likely to be living in accommodation that does not meet decency standards including affordable warmth.

Young people

With rent levels and house prices increasing combined with low incomes it is hard for young people to access accommodation in Medway. There are currently 1260 people under the age of 25 on the council housing register. Limited availability of affordable accommodation means that people are not housed as quickly as they need to be and face becoming homeless. 168 young people aged between 16 and 25 years were accepted as homeless in 2006/7. Appropriate accommodation for young people is sparse.

Homelessness

Homelessness is the most acute expression of housing need. Consequent of its preventative approach to homelessness Medway has seen a significant reduction in homelessness presentations. Rough sleeping levels are low and we are working towards reducing the use of temporary accommodation.

192 households were accepted as homeless in 2007/8. 319 households were in temporary accommodation at 31 March 2008. Whilst progress has been made it is recognised that further improvement is required.

Homeless Presentations and Acceptances for 2006/7 and 2007/8

Year	Presentations	Acceptances	Not Eligible	Not Homeless	No priority need	Intentionally homeless
2006/07	570	302	2	190	44	32
2007/08	379	191	1	109	29	49

Further details on the issues and approach is set out in the Homelessness Strategy 2008-11.

Household size, overcrowding and under-occupation

As important as headline numbers is the need to ensure the right size and type of homes and in the right place to meet needs and help achieve sustainable communities. In recent years the market generally has witnessed the prevalence of apartment development in both the private and social sectors. Regionally concerns have been raised that the needs of families are not being met adequately and the housing stock is becoming less flexible in its ability to meet changing needs. The government wants to see a substantial reduction in the number of overcrowded households and this is closely tied to its ambition to eradicate child poverty by 2020.

Within Medway overcrowding at 3.5% is not a major issue overall being only slightly above the UK average of 3%⁵. Highest rates are within the social sector ranging from 8% in 'mhs homes' to 14% in RSL properties.

⁵ Survey of English Housing Condition 2001/02

By contrast 35% of homes are under-occupied with highest rates of under-occupancy in the owner occupied sector. Nevertheless, some 21% of 'mhs homes' are under-occupied as are 8% of council owned homes.

Housing growth and land supply

The number of new dwellings Medway is required to provide is set out in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006 and the emerging south east plan. The structure plan requires 11,500 dwellings (av. 766pa) for the period 2001 to 2016 and the draft south-east plan 16,300 dwellings (av. 815pa) for the period 2006-2026.

Medway Council has seen a large number of approvals for residential developments in recent years with planning permission for over 8,000 additional homes. In 2007/8 there were 761 net housing completions almost reaching the structure plan target of 780 – gross completions were substantially higher. There were 230 gross affordable housing completions – 28% of total completions against a target of 25%

With a net total of 1321⁶ dwellings currently under construction the housing trajectory for the next few years indicates acceleration however a downturn in the economy will impact on future build rates.

The Medway Local Plan (2003) sets out the basis for land use. A new Local Development Framework (LDF) is being produced to guide future development in Medway. The Council has limited capacity to provide new land for residential development and is largely reliant on private developers to identify development opportunities for the supply of new housing.

The Government has set a national target for at least 60% of housing completions to be on 'previously developed land'. With the emphasis on urban regeneration in Medway local performance has substantially and consistently exceeded this target. In 2006/7, 91% of new housing developments were on previously developed land (brownfield sites). These include redeveloped land, conversions, extensions and backland/infill developments.

Stock condition

Medway has a higher proportion of owner-occupied homes and a lower proportion of private rented homes than regionally and nationally. Overall the stock has a similar age profile although slightly more pre 1919 dwellings. Aging properties generally require more work and investment to maintain them in good repair and present a challenge in keeping them hazard free under the Housing

⁶ Annual Monitoring Report 2008

Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and in meeting decent homes standards.

Evidence indicates that the majority of home owners have the ability to maintain their homes to the necessary standard. There are however a significant number of households that live in poor housing conditions many of whom are vulnerable including:

- 6,500 vulnerable households living in private sector non decent housing
- 3798 homes requiring improved energy efficiency are occupied by elderly households

Private sector stock condition and decent homes

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) replaces the previous fitness standard, and is used to assess the condition of housing. The HHSRS is a means of identifying hazards in a dwelling and evaluating potential effects on the health and safety of the occupants, visitors, neighbours and passers-by.

By combining the hazard and the likelihood of occurrence we are able to develop a hazard rating. Local Authorities are under a statutory duty to take action to remedy what are known as category 1 hazards, whilst there are discretionary powers to take action on category 2 hazards.

The 2007 stock condition survey identified category 1 and 2 hazards in over 36% of dwellings – in 40% of instances this was associated with excess cold, in 34% with falls on stairs and in 11% for falls on the level.

Some 15% (15,500 homes) of all dwellings in Medway are estimated to possess a category 1 hazard - over 96% being due to excessive cold with the highest incidence found in older dwellings. Nearly a fifth of these homes are found in Gillingham.

Decent Homes Standard

The Government introduced the decent homes standard for social housing in 2000. This was extended to include vulnerable households in private sector accommodation in 2002. Public sector agreement 7 (PSA 7), defines a decent home as being '*one which is wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities*'. It sets rising targets for the proportion of vulnerable households in the private sector living in decent homes – 65% by 2006; 70% by 2010; 75% by 2020.

The level of non-decency across Medway ranges from 15% in wards including Lordswood and Rainham rising to over 30% in the north and south wards of Gillingham and Watling. The highest number of vulnerable households living in non decent housing is identified in Chatham Central, Luton and Gillingham.

It is estimate that it would cost £181m to bring all homes up to the minimum decent homes standard – an average £8,388 per dwelling.

Stock condition data shows that the 2006 target was narrowly missed by 1.1%. To meet the 2010 target further improvement of 6.18% needs to be achieved.

Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty

The Government's Housing Green paper sets a target of all new homes to be carbon neutral by 2016 as well as improving the energy efficiency of existing homes. The Home Energy Conservation Act requires local authorities to improve energy efficiency in the area by 30% by 2011. At the end of 2007 Medway had achieved a 29.70% improvement in energy efficiency.

The overall energy efficiency rating of the private sector housing stock is better than the national average with an average SAP rating of 56⁷.

An estimated 23.2% (24,054) of households in Medway are at risk of fuel poverty – ie have to spend more than 10% of income to achieve an adequate level of warmth. This is far higher than the national average, the latest estimate of which is about 7%.

Empty homes

At 31 March 2008 there were 2,686 empty homes in the private sector - 1.6% of total stock and well below the national target of having less than 3% of homes empty. Of these 1,411 homes had been empty for more than six months - a reduction of 15% since 2003. These figures exclude second homes and holiday lets and properties which are empty but usually occupied by students.

Medway compares well with other authorities in the south east which range from 0.3% to 3.2% (April 2006).

Despite a low proportion overall the 2007 stock condition survey identified a wide variation in the distribution of empty homes ranging from 0.5% to 3.8% with the highest concentrations in the sub areas of Chattam and Gillingham. The survey concluded that while empty homes is not a serious problem overall in Medway it recognised that it is an issue the council wishes to address due to clusters in some areas.

The detail is set out in the Empty Homes Strategy 2008-11.

⁷ 2007 Housing Condition Survey

Aim 1 – Maximise the supply of suitable and affordable housing and meet housing need

Achieving this aim will directly contribute towards achieving the Council's following strategic priorities by enabling vulnerable members of society to live in secure, safe, affordable housing located within sustainable communities.

- A clean and green environment
- Safer communities
- Children and young people having the best start in life
- Older and Vulnerable people maintaining their independence
- Everyone benefiting from the area's regeneration

Medway, in common with London and the rest of the south east of England, has an acute shortage of affordable housing. The housing needs study identified a shortfall of 1281 affordable homes each year – significantly more than the structure plan housing target of 780⁸ homes per annum and that of the emerging south east plan.

The provision of a range of housing options, including affordable homes, is essential to meet the differing needs of the community and to help drive economic growth and regeneration.

The strategic approach to meeting needs will include the development of new affordable housing schemes but will equally be about improving the existing housing stock, bringing empty properties back into use and helping households remain in their own homes rather than presenting themselves as homeless.

INCREASING NEW SUPPLY

New affordable housing

Housing supply is market driven and susceptible to change within the economy. The impact of the current economic downturn is being felt within the housing industry. Commentators advise that it will be some considerable time, and much longer than initially thought, before there is economic recovery. This may well impact on housing and affordable housing supply within Medway.

The council will continue to maximise the supply of affordable housing through the planning system. Currently securing at least 25% affordable housing on

⁸ Medway Annual Monitoring Report December 2008

suitable sites the Council has now made a commitment to increase this to 30% in line with regional planning targets and guidance. This will be reviewed further when the regional plan is finally adopted.

The target for affordable housing is set through local planning policy and this will be amended to reflect this change. Until this time the Council will aim to increase the percentage of affordable housing secured through the planning system, although it can only enforce adopted planning policy.

On sites with an affordable housing requirement we will promote and use our negotiation procedures when pre-planning application discussions take place. The guidance sits alongside the developer contributions framework and should ensure that developers make arrangements for securing affordable housing before a planning application is submitted.

As part of the new local area agreement between Medway and Government, the local strategic partnership which includes Medway Council, has set new targets for the increased delivery of affordable housing over the next 3 years:

	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Affordable completions	177	195	245

Achieving high quality affordable housing

We will seek a balanced approach to delivering homes that meets identified need ensuring that developments are sustainable and contribute to the regeneration of Medway. We will continue to achieve this by delivering a mix of social rented and intermediate affordable housing, and by achieving targets for a range of home sizes from 1 to 5 bedrooms.

We require all new affordable housing development to comply with Housing Corporation quality and design standards. We will continue to raise our own standards as practice and technology allow. Code for Sustainable Homes level 3 is a minimum and we will continue to review this target and monitor performance.

Increasing investment

In order to maximise funding it is recognised that continued partnership working is essential between the Council, its preferred affordable housing providers, developers and the Housing Corporation.

Housing Corporation funding to support the delivery of affordable homes increased from £10.7m in 2004-06 programme to £58.4m in 2006-08 delivering 286 and 521 respectively. The 2008-11 programme has seen changes in the way resources are allocated with an increased emphasis on delivery of the targets set out in 'Homes for the Future' with investment nationally of £8bn. Over the next

ten years 160,000 new homes are forecast to be built in the Thames Gateway and the Housing Corporation expects to invest in around 40% of these to provide affordable homes.

Schemes currently on site will deliver an additional 655 affordable homes at a total investment of over £45m. To further increase delivery we will continue to work in partnership with affordable housing providers and developers to secure funding from the Housing Corporation. This will involve:

- Ensuring, at an early stage, that new developments will achieve the required mix of tenure and type of housing to meet the local need and create sustainable communities
- Continuing to develop predictive forecasting techniques and monitoring to track funding levels and number of units against targets
- Reviewing the Council's land holdings as this could offer a valuable resource in achieving an increased supply of affordable housing
- Continuing to work closely with Medway Renaissance on key regeneration sites.
- Continuing to monitor needs in response to a changing economic environment and demographic profile

Partnership working

We will continue to work with the North Kent Housing Partnership to improve efficiency and effectiveness in delivering affordable housing and based on shared good practice, standardised Section 106 agreements and jointly commission research.

The Partnership has also selected six preferred affordable housing partners in association with the Housing Corporation, whilst locally we also have four additional partners. In line with good practice we will review these arrangements to ensure we are achieving schemes that are innovative, meet local need and provide value for money.

We will continue to work with other affordable housing providers and non-registered social landlords to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Choice, mobility and allocations

Housing choice is fundamental to the creation of sustainable communities by creating places where people have actively chosen to live. Medway was among

the first local authorities to introduce a choice based lettings scheme and has been active in developing a range of housing options for households in need.

In line with national objectives Medway intends to work with partners to develop a regional choice based scheme with the aim of offering more choice and better value for money.

To help ensure fairness and transparency in affordable housing allocations the Council has recently implemented a new allocations policy.

MAKING BEST USE OF EXISTING HOMES

Empty homes

Whilst the proportion of empty homes in Medway is relatively low there are nevertheless 1,411 long term empty homes in the private sector.

The effective use of the existing housing stock is a key element in meeting housing need. Bringing empty homes back into use will rejuvenate neighbourhoods and aid in the regeneration of Medway, reduce the attraction and occurrence of anti-social behaviour, reduce pressure to build on green-field sites, and give local people a home.

The council will work in partnership with statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies and with landlords and owners using all the tools at its disposal from advice and assistance to enforcement action and compulsory purchase if necessary.

Maintaining up to date information will enable the number of empty homes to be monitored, resources targeted and progress in bringing properties back into use tracked. By working in partnership with affordable housing providers and funders we intend to make full use of privately owned empty properties to provide an extra source of accommodation for homeless households, single people, key workers and low-priority applicants waiting for social housing.

New initiatives with partners aim to raise the profile of empty homes within the local community. Owners of empty properties will be able to draw on this coordinated working for assistance in bringing their properties back into use.

Medway has secured regional funding, as part of the North and West Kent Private Sector Renewal Partnership, to provide repayable financial assistance to owners to tackle empty homes as well provide conversions and flats above commercial premises with a link to nomination rights.

Working with landlords and owners

By working with landlords and owners we want to encourage and advise them on the use and management of their properties. The remit of the private landlord forum will be extended to include anyone with an interest in private sector housing providing an opportunity to comment on services, new initiatives and to network. Opportunities will include the staging of the first landlords' exhibition for Medway and North Kent, which will be open to all landlords and other property professionals and will provide the opportunity for stands and exhibitions, training and workshops.

Private sector temporary accommodation for homeless households

We have made good progress in meeting the Government's target to halve the use of temporary accommodation by 2010. We aim to continue this trend but there is a limited supply of suitable alternative accommodation. We will continue to review the accommodation currently provided taking steps to reduce its use.

Where we do use this type of accommodation we will continue with a programme of cyclical visits to ensure that it meets minimum standards. We will also ensure that those in temporary accommodation are provided with a comprehensive information pack and are visited within two weeks of moving in with regular follow-up visits from their nominated contact officer.

Student accommodation

The provision of a new integrated university campus in Medway will quadruple existing student numbers to about 16,000 by 2016. Medway has a lower than average private rented sector and the influx of student needing accommodation will create further pressure on an already limited market. We will work with the universities and partners to address these issues.

We will work with the universities to develop an accreditation scheme to ensure good standards of accommodation and management are maintained and the impact on local communities managed.

Crash pad accommodation

Consultation has highlighted that young offenders and other vulnerable young people are often unable to be provided with accommodation quickly at a point of crisis. Crash pad accommodation provides accommodation to young people quickly allowing time to secure other temporary accommodation. We will investigate the possibility of providing crash pad accommodation with an experienced provider ensuring that is suitable, safe, available and accessible.

Summary of Issues

- **Shortage in the supply of affordable housing.**
- **Opportunity to attract funding for development.**
- **Need to review the level of affordable housing secured through the planning system.**
- **Need to increase levels of partnership working with the housing corporation and affordable housing providers.**
- **Increase provision of specialist accommodation.**
- **Need to make the best use of existing properties**
- **Need to ensure affordable housing contributes towards the regeneration of Medway**

Aim 2 – Enable vulnerable people to live independent lives

This aim is directly linked to the Council's strategic priorities of older and vulnerable people maintaining their independence and helping children and young people having the best start in life by providing accommodation that meets their needs.

Housing and housing related support often prove pivotal in assisting vulnerable people maintain their independence and in providing choice. The housing strategy makes a valuable contribution through the provision of housing, enabling access to the housing market, providing advice and support services and helping people to maintain or make their current home more suitable. It is predicated on effective joined up services and strong partnership working.

With an increasing ageing population the challenge is to reduce the number of older people living in inappropriate accommodation and to support them to maintain independence. The strategy is to increase the supply of suitable housing including sheltered and extra care; improve the suitability and safety of existing homes including through preventive and assistive technology; care and support; advice and assistance. The detail is set out in the Older Persons Housing Strategy 2008-11.

With increasing levels of disability the strategy is to increase the supply of suitable accommodation and for new affordable housing to be 'future proofed' with 50% being built to lifetime homes standards. In addition 2% will meet full wheelchair standards and 10% will be dedicated towards developing supported housing schemes. We aim to increase housing choice by promoting and encouraging the take-up of homebuy among people with disabilities. The strategy also aims to improve the suitability and safety of existing homes including through preventive and assistive technology; care and support services; advice and assistance. The detail is set out in the Strategy for the Provision of Housing for People with Disabilities 2008-11.

NEW PROVISION

We will work with affordable housing providers to increase the provision of accommodation specifically designated for vulnerable people of all ages and for those people with disabilities. Needs analysis undertaken with stakeholders and partners including clients, care providers, supporting people and housing services has allowed us to develop a schedule of accommodation that is needed.

Short to medium term plans include:

- 24 Wheelchair accessible homes
- 12 units for individuals with low level support needs
- Up to 6 units as part of an assessment unit for individuals currently living at home or planning to move from residential care
- Accommodation for 5 people with a high level of disability requiring full wheelchair accessible accommodation

Medium to long term plans include:

- A further 24 units of move-on accommodation
- Two 5 bed schemes for profoundly disabled individuals
- 8 units designed specifically for people with severe challenging behaviour
- Access to shared ownership for people with a learning disability
- Sheltered housing schemes
- Over 300 Extra Care units

MAINTAINING EXISTING HOMES

Medway home improvement agency (HIA)

The Home Improvement Agency Service will be re-tendered and we are currently reviewing good practice and working with stakeholders to develop a new model for the service.

We will continue to support the Medway Home Improvement Agency and will use this service to sign post other advice and assistance services. We will also work with this agency on the administration of our private sector renewal and regeneration assistance initiatives. We will commission a HIA service that routinely gives energy efficiency advice and assistance to service users.

Hospital discharge

We will continue to work with the NHS and the PCT to facilitate the safe discharge of applicants in housing need from hospital. We will also work with the Medway Home Improvement Agency to make minor repairs or adaptations to the properties of people that are leaving hospital.

Medway HomeSafe

In partnership with Kent Police, Kent Fire Service, Medway Community Safety Partnership and Hyde Housing Association we will continue to support the Medway Homesafe Scheme. This scheme aims to help people feel safe and secure in their own homes by providing security works, small repairs, minor aids and adaptations to their homes.

Disabled facilities grant

Disabled facilities grants (DFGs) provide funding for adaptations to make homes more suitable and accessible to enable vulnerable people to remain in their own home for longer.

We will work to promote the take up of DFGs amongst all eligible people. We will survey and measure the effectiveness of grant funded adaptations to ensure the targeting of resources remains effective. This survey will also allow us to gauge service users perceptions and make improvements.

Preventive technology

We will continue to promote the benefits and the take up of preventative technology which enables people remain in their homes when they require a more intensive form of support. We will also look at promoting the benefits of telemedicine as and when the technological developments allow.

HOUSING RELATED SUPPORT

Supporting people

The supporting people programme provides housing related support to prevent problems that can often lead to hospitalisation; institutional care or homelessness and can help the smooth transition to independent living for those leaving an institutionalised environment.

We will continue to promote the most effective use of accommodation and support that is funded by supporting people. Supporting people funding currently provides over £6m for more than 1100 units of supported units.

Floating support

We will continue to provide and develop our housing related support, which is available to people for up to 18 months to help them keep or achieve the skills necessary for independent living. This service, known as the 'Lifeways Scheme', is commissioned through the supporting people service and provided in association with West Kent Housing Association. The scheme currently provides support for three hundred people across Medway.

Outreach support

We are continuing to develop a programme of long term support delivered directly to the service user in their own home, making use of local hubs which will be located within supported housing schemes.

Medway mediation

We will continue to work with Medway Mediation services to resolve young peoples housing situations. Medway Mediation fully or partially resolved 80% of the cases referred to them, usually preventing people from being immediately in danger of being homeless.

Young persons services hub

Accessing services is a problem for young people and the services a young care leaver may have to deal with could be in different locations. We will investigate the feasibility of setting up a multi-agency youth services hub that will be the first point of contact for young people when coming to the council.

The Medway supported housing gateway

Medway Council has commenced a project to provide a “single point of access” into supported housing in Medway. The project will offer a coordinated access route for all supporting people (SP) contracted services by developing a dedicated computer system and a commitment to partnership working from all the SP providers and our own referring staff.

We will continue to develop the Medway Supported Housing Gateway and ensure that the benefits are used to provide better, more cohesive services. It aims to streamline the referrals and nominations process, delivering a system that is transparent and easy to use for supported housing providers and referring agencies. The Gateway will enable:

- Online assessments of support needs to be registered
- Referrals to be made and progress shown
- Identification of risks
- Tracking and monitoring of vacancies in accommodation-based and floating support schemes
- “Flagging” of potential evictions

ACCESSING THE MARKET

The Deposit Guarantee

We will review the need for a deposit guarantee scheme for Medway and if required will develop a scheme to assist vulnerable people in housing need to access privately rented accommodation.

Looked after children

The Council is legally a ‘parent’ for a number of children across Medway. We will investigate the feasibility of providing assistance for young people leaving care to

access the private rented housing market through guarantor and rent deposit schemes.

Housing advice and assistance

We will continue to provide housing advice and assistance to all residents of Medway. The information and advice service will ensure that there is a suite of information available in verbal, printed and electronic formats. We will ensure that additional information is available for vulnerable people and ensure that information is targeted suitably. There will also be a dedicated Young Persons Housing Options officer available to assist vulnerable young people with their housing situation.

Disabled persons accommodation agency (DPAA)

A registered charity, the Disabled Persons Accommodation Agency (DPAA) aims to match disabled people with suitably adapted, adaptable or accessible housing in Kent that is held on a property database. We will continue to work with the DPAA to provide an advocacy service for vulnerable disabled clients.

HomeBuy

We will continue to work with the HomeBuy agent to promote the concept of and take-up of the various shared ownership options enabling people to take a first step on the property ladder.

Summary of Issues

- **Rising population of people over 60's in Medway.**
- **Rising level of disability.**
- **Older People and people with disabilities tend to have lower incomes and are more likely to be at risk of fuel poverty.**
- **High need for accommodation specifically for older people and people with disabilities.**
- **Reduction in funding from Supporting People funding for new supported housing schemes.**
- **Scope to implement and develop joint working protocols with services for vulnerable people**
- **Advances in Telecare and Telemedicine provide opportunities for more people to remain at home.**
- **More effective and practical advice needed for vulnerable people.**

Aim 3 – Improve the quality and energy efficiency of housing

Achieving this aim will help towards the Council's following strategic priorities being realised through the delivery of higher quality more energy efficient homes and by working with existing home owners to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

- A clean and green environment
- Safer communities
- Children and young people having the best start in life
- Older and Vulnerable people maintaining their independence
- Everyone benefiting from the area's regeneration

The strategy aims to target poor conditions in private housing and their occupants. It concentrates on improving the personal circumstances of residents, particularly vulnerable people, improving the condition and management of their homes and the surrounding environment. This will be achieved by pursuing sustainable initiatives and solutions and in partnership with a range of agencies. Action will range from advice and assistance to use of enforcement powers where necessary. The detail is set out in the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2008-11.

In order to strengthen the private sector renewal programme we are working in partnership with 7 neighbouring district councils to increase the level of investment in improving housing conditions. We have successfully attracted £9.73m of which Medway will receive £2.48m.

Target areas for intervention

In line with good practice and building upon experience of successfully targeting resources priority areas for private sector renewal activity have been identified using a range of data sources. This approach complements the council's social regeneration strategy which identifies target areas for more widespread action.

Agreed priority areas for private sector intervention are:

- All Saints Neighbourhood Renewal Initiative, Chatham, which will build on work already undertaken in this area, and possibly extend into the Brook Lines Area
- Marlborough Rd/ North Gillingham

These areas have a high incidence of priority indicators and are considered as suitable for the development of targeted initiatives and interventions that will bring about improvements in housing conditions and management.

Decent Homes

The Government's public service agreement target (PSA 7) is to make 70% of non decent homes occupied by vulnerable households decent by 2010. This target sets the baseline for our work in this area. In December 2006 Medway had less than 65% of vulnerable households living in non decent homes in the private sector. Our approach to achieving the 2010 target involves improving both owner occupied and tenanted homes.

Decent homes standards in the council housing stock will be achieved by the Government target date of 2010 and we will continue to meet the aspirations of our tenants by making improvements above that standard.

Energy efficiency and fuel poverty

The overall energy efficiency rating of the private sector housing stock is better than the national average with an average SAP rating of 56. At the end of 2007 Medway had achieved a 29.70% improvement in energy efficiency against the Government target of 30% improvement by 2011.

However an estimated 23.2% (24,054) of households in Medway are at risk of fuel poverty - far higher than the national average, the latest estimate of which is about 7%.

The strategy is to target resources to areas with highest incidences of concern identified from a range of indicators and to vulnerable households.

We will continue to work in association with the Kent Energy Centre to provide advice and assistance on energy savings initiatives including the promotion of Warm Front schemes which are particularly aimed at vulnerable people. These services will be promoted through targeted advertising, and other information, and can be contacted by free phone or via the Internet.

We also provide information on various schemes offered outside of the Council and the Kent Energy Centre and ensure that information and literature is available at all of our council offices to help residents identify fuel poverty and raise awareness of services.

Further detail is set out in the Fuel Poverty and Home Energy Conservation Strategy 2008-11.

Vulnerable home owners and private tenants

The priority is to assist elderly, disabled and vulnerable homeowners to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible and to ensure that their homes are decent, safe and warm. This will be achieved by providing a range of financial advice and assistance (resources permitting) which will be specifically available to assist vulnerable home owners and for private tenants homes to meet the decent homes standard including:

- disabled facilities grants
- discretionary home repair assistance
- area based intervention
- house proud loans and equity release schemes

The Medway home improvement agency will continue to assist vulnerable homeowners who are over 60 or disabled and who need assistance with funding repairs, finding builders and organizing repair works. They also provide a handy person service for minor works.

Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)

There are some 950 HMOs in Medway providing an important source of housing often for those with limited options. Whilst numbers are comparatively low these properties generally exhibit some of the worst condition and management standards.

The strategy is to work with landlords, agents and tenants using a range of advice and assistance to ensure standards are met and maintained but also using enforcements powers where necessary. We have adopted the Kent and Medway joint HMO amenity standards and are partners in the joint fire protocol.

National mandatory licensing is regarded as a positive step helping efforts to improve the condition and management of HMOs. We will consider moving to additional licensing after we have assessed the impact of mandatory licensing.

Building upon HMO licensing work it is intended to develop an accreditation scheme in association with the North Kent Housing Partnership and the universities at Medway.

Summary of Issues

- **Need implementation of a private sector renewal strategy.**
- **Ongoing need to make more properties “Decent” in the private sector.**
- **Need to improve the energy efficiency of new provisions as well as improving energy efficiency of existing stock across all tenures.**
- **Need to reduce level of fuel poverty.**
- **Corporate focus on regeneration.**
- **Need for an accreditation scheme for private sector landlords**

Aim 4 – Sustainable communities

The creation of sustainable communities will help towards the Council's following strategic priorities being realised.

- A clean and green environment
- Safer communities
- Children and young people having the best start in life
- Older and Vulnerable people maintaining their independence
- Everyone benefiting from the area's regeneration

Housing services have an important enabling role to play in developing balanced communities, promoting social inclusion, reducing crime and enhancing the quality of life for residents. The Government has placed considerable emphasis on the creation of sustainable balanced communities, defined as places where people want to live and work.

New homes

The housing strategy is written on the context of the extensive physical, social and economic regeneration that is underway in Medway. Considering plans for new housing provision alongside regeneration policies ensures that delivering a wide range of type, tenure and size of homes to meet many different needs will help ensure long-term and balanced viable communities.

Neighbourhood renewal

There is a strong link between deprivation and poor health, poor housing conditions and poor local environments. Housing services have a focus on reducing these differences with proposals and programmes that target areas of deprivation and the most vulnerable households eg private sector renewal activity to improve housing condition.

£9.73m neighbourhood renewal funding has been secured in partnership with seven neighbouring authorities to improve housing conditions and help tackle deprivation. £2.48m will be invested in Medway over the next three years improving at least 550 homes.

Empty properties

Empty homes represent economic, environmental and social costs to the community. As homes deteriorate they become visually unattractive, affecting the

amenity of the surrounding area creating an impression of decline and neglect. Empty homes can be a focus for vandalism and anti-social behaviour posing a risk for neighbouring properties and local residents.

Bringing empty homes back into use will make a significant contribution to the regeneration of Medway. Where possible projects will be developed that make better use of these properties and are beneficial to the local community. It is recognized that in some instances there may be an increase in the number of empty properties in an area prior to redevelopment – where this is the case we will work with partner services to reduce the impact this may have on a community.

Equality and diversity

Through equality and diversity impact assessment the council aims to ensure equality considerations are integrated within all policy development and service delivery from the outset and diversity. This will help in delivering equitable services, understanding needs and preferences and making sure the right services are provided building cohesive communities.

Black and minority ethnic communities (BME)

Whilst the black and minority ethnic (BME) population of 5.4%⁹ is below the national average (8.7%) the council recognizes that the population is made up of diverse groups of people who have a valuable contribution to make to the future economic and social vitality of Medway.

BME households are more likely to be overcrowded – recent work shows that in Medway 9.9% of these households are overcrowded compared to 3.5% for the population as a whole. BME households are under represented on the housing register and in social rented housing.

We are committed to ensuring that 30% of all new affordable housing negotiated through the planning system has at least 3 bedrooms for larger families. Included within this target will be separate requirements for houses with 4 and 5 bedrooms.

The council is committed to allocating increased funding for research into the need of BME communities including the need for housing related support and specialist types of housing provision.

We will ensure that BME communities are much more involved in the planning and delivery of housing services through the establishment of a BME housing group.

⁹ Medway Community Plan 2007-10

Gypsies and travellers

The 2007 “Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment” (GTAA), jointly commissioned with Dartford, Gravesham and Swale Borough Councils, indicates a need for 10 new pitches over the next five years in Medway. However, discussions are being undertaken at a national and regional level to consider the countywide requirements and explore whether there is any flexibility in distributing allocations across the county.

Some of the key findings from the survey include that 79.5% of families said their accommodation was adequate for their needs. The main problem identified by those saying the accommodation was inadequate was that the accommodation was too small. A quarter of all families stated that they were worried about health and safety on their site; the main concern being around the issue of fire prevention. We will work with Kent Fire Service to increase awareness of fire prevention issues on sites.

Following on from the GTAA we will continue to monitor needs and aspirations and use the data to inform policies and plans such as the local development framework.

Further detail is set out in the Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy 2008-11.

Summary of Issues

- **Opportunity to develop additional affordable housing units.**
- **Opportunity to bring empty homes back into use to meet housing need.**
- **Continued focus to improve housing in areas of high deprivation**
 - **Opportunities for affordable housing to contribute to the regeneration of Medway.**
 - **Needs Identified for more specialist housing for vulnerable people.**
 - **Continued focus on providing mixed and sustainable communities.**
 - **Need to engage vulnerable people, community members and tenants to improve service delivery**

Aim 5 – Better services

One of Medway Council's core values is *putting our customers at the centre of everything we do*, and much of the work of the housing service is closely integrated with what is happening corporately.

One of the council's core values is *'putting our customers at the centre of everything we do'*. Our aim is to ensure that housing services are as accessible as possible to local people. This involves using a full range of customer contact facilities which suit different needs, a focus on customer care in all our dealings with the public, involving people in how services are run, and meeting the varied requirements of a diverse population.

Improving services

Throughout the strategy we have highlighted the services available to people with housing and related needs and how, with the involvement of service users, housing providers and partner agencies, we intend to ensure that services are responsive to changing needs, are promoted to users and are easily accessible.

As part of this we are committed to monitoring the housing market, housing need and housing condition, undertaking further research as required, to enable the effective planning and delivery of services.

We will continue to monitor customer satisfaction including:

- Homechoice
- Adaptation services
- Energy efficiency advice
- Home improvement agency
- New affordable housing residents
- Housing advice

We will also continue to involve as many services and partner agencies as possible in housing related training to help provide more comprehensive services to the residents of Medway.

Improving our Knowledge

Training

We will continue to involve as many services as possible in housing related training. Involving our partners in as much training as possible will help provide more comprehensive services to the residents of Medway.

Recruitment

In order to strengthen the service provided to empty homeowners we have recruited an additional empty homes officer to deal primarily with enforcement and the provision of financial assistance directly to private landlords. This officer will work in unison with the strategic empty homes officer to bring properties back into use.

Housing Market Assessment

We will undertake regular Housing Market Assessments to gain extensive and accurate information about the current housing market. We will also explore the possibility of undertaking the Housing Market Assessment on a sub regional basis.

We will also continue to collect and monitor regular information about the housing market from other external sources.

We will undertake Equality & Diversity Impact Assessments on all strategies, policies and procedures.

To ensure that when Medway Council and its partners develop policies that reflect the current equality and diversity legislative framework. We are committed to undertake Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments. These ensure that equality considerations are integrated within all policy development or service delivery from the outset.

Sub-regional Working

Medway are keen to be fully engaged in sub-regional working to ensure that resources are pooled, greater capacity is provided and strategic housing work is undertaken at a sub-regional level.

We are part of the Kent Housing Group, which is a forum made up of senior housing staff from housing associations and local authorities across Kent and Medway. The Group aims to be the voice of housing in Kent by helping to shape and set the housing agenda, to build relationships and influence decisions for the benefit of people living and working in Kent and Medway.

The Strategy and Enabling Group is the sub group of the Kent Housing Group. The purpose of the group is to support the work of the Kent Housing Group with a definite focus on strategic housing issues.

We are also part of the North Kent Housing Partnership, which is made up of Gravesham Bough Council, Dartford Bough Council, Swale Bough Council and the Housing Corporation and is committed to the delivery of new housing and community investment plans in North Kent. The partnership aims to support further local and regional investment priorities and undertake research on local housing markets and community aspirations.

Monitoring of Strategies

The housing strategies will play a key part in the delivery of the housing strategy as well as service improvement.

We will form monitoring groups for each of the strategies and develop work plans to carry out points that are within the action plans.

For each of the sub-strategies a cross-departmental monitoring group will be established and this will be the main body responsible for monitoring the strategy's progress and achievement. They will meet quarterly and their membership will include officers and key stakeholders with links or a major contribution to the delivery of the strategy.

These groups will then in turn report to the Medway Strategic Housing Board, on a regular basis.

The Strategies contain specific and measurable indicators that track and evaluate the strategy's progress. These will be developed and they will form part of the Housing Services performance management framework. The Various strategy monitoring groups will review the report at their meetings and intervene if performance is seen to be slipping in any area.

Summary of Issues

- **Need for continually improving services with improved access for residents.**
- **A highlighted need for better working relationships between internal services.**
- **More effective working needed with partners.**
- **Opportunities to broaden relationships with Private Sector Landlords**
- **Opportunity for regular review and monitoring of strategic action plans through cross-departmental working**

Resourcing the housing strategy 2008-11

Resources to deliver the housing strategy will be provided from across the public, private and voluntary sectors. It will take the form of funding, staff time, professional expertise and the re-use of available or surplus assets.

Resources are inevitably limited and the comprehensive spending review requires 3% annual efficiency savings across local government over the next three years.

New housing provision

As part of the Thames Gateway Medway lies within a main priority area for Housing Corporation funding for affordable housing and investment has increased considerably over recent years.

New funding arrangements emphasise the deliverability of schemes which must also meet enhanced standards of design and sustainability. Main allocations are made followed by the potential for additional funding through formal periodic market engagements.

For 2008-11 Medway has received a main allocation of over £20m which will deliver over 250 homes – the fourth highest allocation in the region. A further £1.6m has been allocated following the first market engagement in May 2008.

Allocations have been achieved for a comprehensive development programme which offers good value for money with many schemes being developed without the need for Housing Corporation funding with an overall grant per person of £6,642 compared to the regional average of £12,896 per person.

Although in the past Medway Council has directly invested considerable capital sums in the provision of affordable housing the current programme is sustainable without the need for such investment.

To maintain this programme and in order to achieve future provision and the Council will also continue to promote affordable housing in the following ways:-

- Review partnering arrangements with affordable housing providers to maximise Housing Corporation Investment
- Ensure that the maximum level of affordable housing is achieved through the planning system

- Review the level of affordable housing required on new developments
- Ensure that the opportunity to promote affordable housing development is considered whenever the Council develops or disposes of surplus land holdings
- Act as an advocate for Medway in bidding for regional housing funds and developing effective regional, sub-regional and local analysis and representation
- Ensure the inclusion of affordable housing needs in regional and local land use planning

Private sector renewal

Medway as part of the North and West Kent Private Sector Renewal Partnership has seen its successful bid attract a total £9.75m regional funding with Medway receiving £2.48m over the next 3 years. The funds attracted will form part of an expanded private sector capital investment programme.

To be successful the Partnership's bid had to show funds would be used innovatively to improve private sector housing, and are based upon the provision of loans rather than grants leading to more effective investment.

Work will focus on bringing empty properties back into use, improving energy conservation and dealing with properties in poor conditions through individual action as well as through targeted area interventions.

Home adaptations (private sector)

Disabled facilities grants of £2.85m and £0.6m for occupational therapy adaptations will be provided in 2008-11.

Empty homes

£900,000 to provide assistance to bring empty homes back into use including opportunities for conversions and flats above commercial premises

Council owned homes

The council retains the ownership of some 3000 homes within the former Gillingham Borough Council area. The day to day running costs are managed through the ring-fenced housing revenue account with rents and service charges providing the main source of income.

Capital funding of £2.9m in 2008/9 has been financed from Government borrowing approvals and the major repairs allowance and invested as follows:

- planned maintenance - £2,791,398 - firstly to fund all works identified in the stock condition survey to meet the Decent Home Standard with any residual funding will be used to address expenditure on essential works e.g. the asbestos register and asbestos removal.
- disabled Adaptations - £100,000 - for conversions and adaptations to council stock that will improve the quality of life for disabled and elderly council tenants.

The projected programme for 2008/2009 has been based upon results from the 2007 stock condition survey and the need to reach the decent homes standard for all dwellings by 2010. Once, the results have been fully analysed proposals will be developed setting out all the works required to meet Decent Homes components by 2010, and will include details as to how the works will be funded. For the future, and the Council's ability to meet and maintain Decent Homes Standard, it is likely that there will need to be additional contributions from either or both the housing revenue account working balance and the major repairs reserve.

Housing allocations, advice and reducing homelessness

The Council invests in initiatives that are targeted at:

- Reducing homelessness
- Providing advice on housing related issues
- Administering the Councils Housing Register
- Allocation of empty social housing where the Council has nomination rights.

The Council also provides grant funding to external agencies to deliver preventative homelessness services such as mediation services. Investment in these services assists the most vulnerable members of our community to maintain or access accommodation and has contributed to a reduction in homelessness and the reduced use of temporary accommodation.

Supporting people grant

A total of £6,266,178 supporting people (SP) grant was received by Medway as the administering authority for 2008/9 and is used to provide a wide range of accommodation based and peripatetic support services for vulnerable people.

Managing and monitoring delivery

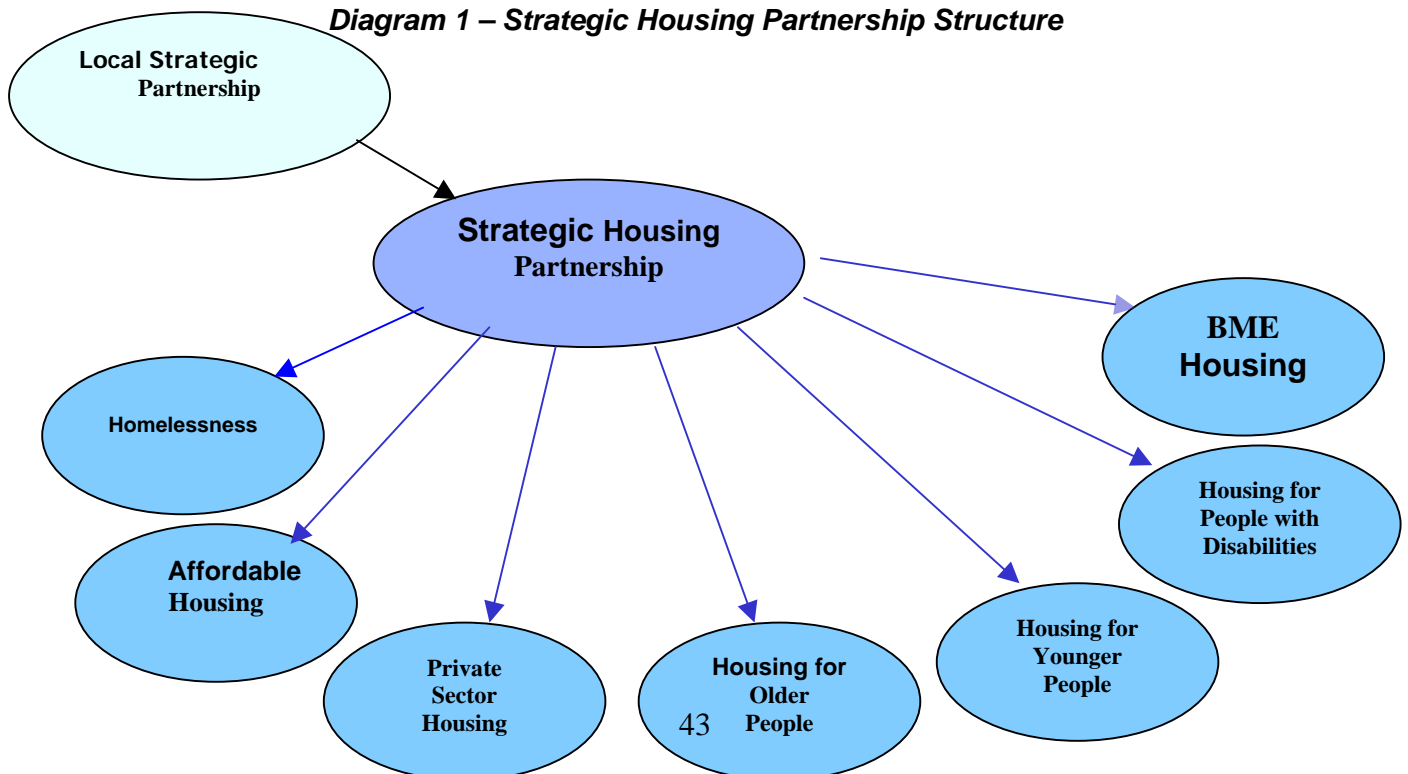
The Strategic Housing Partnership (SHP) has been established to ensure a wide range of high quality housing is available across all sectors of the housing market for Medway people. Housing which is secure, affordable, of the highest standard and meets varying needs and the aspirations of all our residents throughout their lives.

The partnership is responsible for delivering the priorities and actions identified by the Housing Strategy 2008-11 and for the monitoring of performance against the suite of specialist sub-strategies and related action plans. This enables key stakeholders the opportunity to contribute and lead on the delivery of the strategy. The SHP is a dynamic forum of key public and private players involved in housing and will consider good practice and new initiatives to support this delivery.

Each housing sub-strategy has a cross-departmental monitoring group which is the main body responsible for monitoring progress and achievement. Membership will include officers and key stakeholders with links or a major contribution to the delivery of the strategy. The groups will meet and report progress to the Strategic Housing Board quarterly.

The strategies contain specific and measurable indicators that will be used to track and evaluate progress. These will be developed and they will form part of the housing services performance management framework. The various strategy monitoring groups will review the report at their meetings and intervene if performance is seen to be slipping.

Diagram 1 – Strategic Housing Partnership Structure



Section 5

CONSULTATION WORK

The need for these strategies has been confirmed throughout the various consultation stages undertaken. It has also been underlined by the challenges and opportunities in addressing the issues identified and the Council's need to co-ordinate the actions of a diverse range of agencies in improving the standard of living and health and well-being of our communities.

The effective development of this suite of strategies to this stage has only been possible as a result of extensive and comprehensive consultation and research with stakeholders, partners and the wider community. This has been based on the Housing Strategy and Development Services – Community and Stakeholder Engagement Framework, and sets out full details of the consultation undertaken.

Extensive consultation and research with Medway households has included:-

- A postal survey sent to over 5,400 households in all 22 wards
- Face to face interviews with over 1,000 households in the 22 wards
- Over 3600 properties were visited and surveyed
- Home Energy Rating Assessments were undertaken on nearly 1,200 homes
- Housing Needs Survey
- Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Needs Survey
- Supported and Adapted Housing Survey
- Keyworker Housing Needs Survey
- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment
- 4000 home energy postal surveys
- Empty Properties Survey
- Citizens Panel

Further consultation has also been undertaken with a wide range of partners, stakeholders, staff and client groups including:-

Consultation Events

Representatives of more than 70 services, groups and organisations attended our main consultation event. As part of this event specific workshops were held on a range of issues. Representatives of various stakeholder groups including developing Affordable Housing Providers, Kent Energy Centre and colleagues from the Social Care Disabilities Service facilitated the workshops.

As part of this consultation we asked for feedback from those taking part with 98% of delegates rating the event as good or excellent.

Staff Consultation

As part of the Client and Stakeholder Engagement Framework it was identified that there was the need to ensure that staff were also involved in the process and so a drop in session was held, at which staff were asked to contribute to the process. Those attending included staff from Social Care, Housing, Regeneration and Development.

Workshops

Work was carried out with other stakeholder and client groups including the Learning Disability Forum, Medway Older People's Partnership and Forum for Young Persons Supported Housing and these groups members were asked to convey their experience of the services they receive and how they can be improved. We also carried out a consultation exercise with MeRGe (Medway's residents group).

The information and views gathered as part of this consultation have been summarized within the Framework and have also indicated within which strategy the issues raised have been further addressed.

Main Issues Highlighted during Consultation	Strategy Informed
Section 106 agreements should be evidence based	Affordable Housing
Bring empty properties back into use	Empty Homes
More suitable accommodation for vulnerable groups	BME, Older People, Young People, Provision of Housing for People with Disabilities, Affordable Housing
More work needs to be done with social and private landlords to ensure that properties meet Decent Homes Standards	Private Sector Renewal, Older People, People with Disabilities
Work needs to be done with people who are under-occupying to ensure properties are used to their full potential	Older Persons, Affordable Housing Strategy, Private Sector Renewal
Nominations agreements need to be robust	Affordable Housing Strategy
Improve the energy efficiency of Medway's housing stock	Fuel Poverty and Home Energy Conservation, Affordable Housing
Pro-active approach needed when dealing with Developers	Affordable Housing
A better mix of accommodation is needed on new developments	Affordable Housing
More work needs to be done to promote shared ownership amongst those who are eligible	Affordable Housing, Young People, People with Disabilities, BME
Develop larger homes for BME families	BME, Affordable Housing
Provide site-based information to Gypsy & Traveller groups regarding health and safety, especially fire prevention.	BME
Provide training on Shared Ownership products to identified key members of BME communities	BME
Better access is needed for translation services and translated literature	BME

Ensure Council services are accessible to all groups in Medway	BME
Register and track why properties are empty and use this information to identify trends	Empty Homes
Promote landlord forum	Empty Homes, Private Sector Renewal
Ensure that all enforcement actions are joined up	Empty Homes
Monitor how properties are bought back into use in order to get the best results/mix	Empty Homes
Share best practice via the Kent Empty Homes Forum	Empty Homes
Promote joint working between services	All
Work closely with affordable housing providers to bring empty properties back into use	Affordable Housing, Empty Homes
Identify ways for members of the public to report empty homes	Empty Homes
Need to raise profile and target marketing to vulnerable groups	Fuel Poverty & Home Energy Conservation
Train partners and staff to recognise fuel poverty when visiting people's homes and make appropriate referrals	Fuel Poverty & Home Energy Conservation
Promotion of the freephone telephone number and services offered by the Kent Energy Centre	Fuel Poverty & Home Energy Conservation
Promote support services offered by Medway Council and it's partners to help people to remain in their own homes	Older People, Young People, Provision of Housing for People with Disabilities
Ensure older people's accommodation is situated close to amenities	Older People
Develop an equity release scheme either in house or with a partner agency	Older People
Promote the development and rollout of "Medway Supported Housing Gateway" as a single point of access for referrals to supported people accommodation	Older People, Young People, Provision of Housing for People with Disabilities, Affordable Housing
Provide a home improvement agency service and a handyperson service to support people in their own homes	Older People, Provision of Housing for People with Disabilities
Develop the role of partners in the voluntary sector to provide advice and advocacy for vulnerable people	Older People, Provision of Housing for People with Disabilities

Ensure that new developments are adaptable and flexible (Lifetime Homes)	Older People, Affordable Housing
Provide better information to landlords on tax incentives for carrying out improvements	Private Sector Renewal
Promote the options available for owner-occupiers	Provision of Housing for People with Disabilities
Develop existing facilities	Provision of Housing for People with Disabilities
A more cohesive approach is needed by services for young people approaching the Council	Young People
Provide more support for young people at an earlier stage	Young People

Glossary of terms

The following explains some of the terms and abbreviations used in the document:

Term	Meaning
Accreditation scheme	Formal system for approving private sector rented properties which meet defined standards
Approved Development Programme (ADP)	Housing Corporation funding to housing associations to develop new housing or carry out major improvements.
Affordable Housing	Social rented and intermediate housing (eg. shared ownership; below market rent) provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market
Assistive Technology	Equipment to help people lives independently and safely (e.g. emergency pull cord unit, gas detectors)
Brownfield land	Land previously built on
Choice Based Lettings	New approach to letting empty properties whereby applicants on the Council's Housing Register can choose which properties to be considered for. Applicants having expressed an interest will then be prioritised
Decent Homes	A standard, which all social housing must meet by 2010. The standard requires all properties to have reasonably modern facilities, be in a reasonable state of repair and have effective heating and insulation
Deposit Bond Scheme	This enables people (in housing need) to pay deposits on private rented accommodation
Disabled Facilities Grant	Council grant to help towards the cost of adapting homes for people with disabilities to continue to live there. The adaptations should meet identified needs, be reasonable and practical
Floating support	Support not dependent on having to live in a particular property
Homebuy	Government introduced housing scheme to help people get a foot on the property ladders through low cost home ownership.
Home Improvement Agency (HIA)	The agency, which helps homeowners and private sector tenants who are older and disabled to remain in their own home, living independently. The Council has a contract with a HIA to advise people on improvements and adaptations, help them to apply for local authority grants or loans, identify reputable local contractors and they can oversee the work
Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)	Properties let to three or more tenants who form two or more households with shared facilities (e.g. kitchen). Legislation requires some of these to be licensed by the Council
Housing Association (HA)	Not for profit organisations providing affordable housing

	and which are registered by the Housing Corporation. Also known as Registered social landlords.
Housing Corporation	The government agency that funds new affordable homes and regulates Registered Social Landlords in England
Housing Need	Households who lack their own housing or who live in unsuitable housing and who cannot afford to meet their housing needs in the market
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	The money which is spent on the day-to-day management and repair of council properties; which comes mainly from council rents
Intermediate care	Care services provided at home or in designated care settings, to promote people's independence. It aims to prevent unnecessary hospital admission and effective rehabilitation services to enable early discharge from hospital. It also aims to prevent premature or unnecessary admission to long-term residential care
Intermediate tenures	Renting and ownership options at below market prices
Kent Energy Centre (KEC)	An accredited energy advice centre for Kent who give impartial advice about improving energy efficiency, reducing fuel poverty and advise on grant availability
Key worker	Public sector workers as defined by Governments (such as nurse, teacher, police officer)
LCHO or Low Cost	Subsidised home ownership eg an interest free loan for a percentage of the property value or shared ownership (part buy, part rent)
Lifetime Homes Standard	Houses/flats which have 16 design features with an accent on accessibility and design features that make the home flexible to accommodate the changing needs of households
Local Development Framework (LDF)	A portfolio of updateable documents which will provide the local planning authority's policies for meeting the community's aims for the future of their area. They will replace the Medway Local Plan and guide future development
Local Plan	Medway plan which sets out the basis for land use. To be replaced by the Local Development Framework (LDF)
Medway Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)	Brings together all the main organisations including local businesses, voluntary and community organizations and public bodies such as the police, health services and the council and responsible for the Community Strategy.
Mhs	The housing society that was set up to own and manage the former Rochester City Council housing stock
Move-on	Movements both within and out of supported housing into independent living. It includes people who are moving into lower level accommodation-based support and those moving into independent accommodation, with or without floating support. It may also include people who need to move back into more supported environments
National Indicators (NIs)	A series of 198 data indicators, which indicate how Councils' performance will be measured by Government
Neighbourhood Renewal	A national programme delivered locally which aims to

(NR)	change neighbourhoods and lives so that in 10 years no-one should be disadvantaged by where they live
Nomination Rights	Where the Council has agreed the right to let Registered Social Landlord properties which become empty to households on the Council's Housing Register
Private Sector Assistance	Power of LA to help those in private housing eg owner occupiers, private landlords and their tenants gain access grants, loans, advice etc
Public Service Agreement	Government targets around eg housing, education, health to which public services must contribute.
Regeneration	Improving areas that are run down, neglected, or deprived. Usually involves ways to improve the local economy as well as investment in the physical environment
Registered Social Landlord (RSL)	See housing association
Shared Ownership	Where a person buys part of the value of a house from a housing association and pays rent on the other part
Sheltered Housing	Housing usually for older people with a warden (or scheme manager) to give support
Social Housing	Type of affordable housing, which includes rented dwellings, which are usually owned and managed by either the Council or a Registered Social Landlord
Social Inclusion	Achieving equal opportunities and outcomes by removing barriers that directly or indirectly exclude people from the political, economic, social and cultural experiences that any person would see as their basic right in society
Stakeholders	Any individual or group with an interest ('stake') in the success of an activity (in this case housing) and in delivering results, maintaining and improving services
Supporting People (SP)	A government programme delivered by local councils to commission support to help people stay in their own homes and to live independently
Sustainable, sustainability	Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs
SERHB	South East Regional Housing Board – set up to deliver government's 'Sustainable Communities' programme of action in the region and controls most funding for housing including ADP. Produces the Regional Housing Strategy
Vulnerable Households	Government term for people who may have less access to, but more need for services, because of low income, disability or other personal circumstances. The term vulnerable is seen as rather passive and is not generally favoured by community representatives in Medway
Warm Front grants	Central government energy efficiency grants provided to households