



Policy and Resources Committee – 10 September 2012

Draft Housing Strategy 2012-17

Purpose of report

This report presents Members with the new Draft Housing Strategy 2012-17, and seeks approval to release it for formal public consultation.

Attachment(s)

Appendix 1: Draft Housing Strategy 2012-17

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment Screening

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Most local authorities in England have a housing strategy in place which sets out what they plan to do during the life of the strategy in areas such as assessing and meeting housing need, and housing development.
- 1.2 Whilst it is not a statutory requirement to have a strategy in place, it is widely accepted best practice. In addition to setting out a local authority's plans, a strategy also provides useful information relating to the local housing market and housing needs, which may be required by external organisations such as developers and housing associations.
- 1.3 The council's current Housing Strategy ran from 2006 to 2009 and therefore requires updating. Work commenced on this during 2010, but was then put on hold pending work on the Housing Contract and in anticipation of some significant housing and welfare changes at that time.

2.0 Housing and Welfare Changes

- 2.1 The Localism Act 2011 proposes significant housing reform. The key features of the Act in relation to housing reform that are relevant to this council are:
 - Allocations Reform – greater freedom for Local Authorities to set their own policies relating to who can go onto housing waiting lists. This means, for example, that we will be able to prevent people who have little chance of ever securing affordable housing (due to low priority / need) from joining the Housing Register.
 - Tenure Reform – under the previous system social landlords were only able to grant lifetime tenancies. The Act enables landlords to grant tenancies of varying length depending on people's circumstances. This section also covers the introduction of the new Affordable Rent tenancy, which has recently been incorporated into PPS3.
 - Homelessness Legislation Reform – under previous rules, people who became homeless were able to refuse offers of accommodation in the private sector. The Act provides the option for Local Authorities to discharge their homelessness duty by way of an offer of private rented accommodation, where it is deemed appropriate.
- 2.2 There are also a number of significant changes to the welfare system, known as 'welfare reform', happening alongside the housing reform which need to be considered and taken forward.

- 2.3 In addition, the housing market and housing needs have changed significantly over the last few years on a national level, not least due to the recession and the shifting property market.
- 2.4 To effectively consider all of these issues, and take forward the required pieces of work associated with the Localism Act, a Housing Policy Working Party was set up by this Committee in January 2012 (minute 345).
- 2.5 The working party has to date progressed a number of pieces of work, including a new Tenancy Strategy, a revised Housing Allocation Policy and a Draft Housing Strategy (attached at Appendix 1).

2.0 Draft Housing Strategy

- 2.1 Although the council previously had a housing strategy in place, the majority of the content of that document is now significantly out of date due to all of the recent changes (see section 2 above), and therefore the draft strategy is effectively a brand new document.
- 2.2 All local authorities are required by law to have a homelessness strategy in place. The council's Homelessness Strategy is also due to be revised, and the Housing Policy Working Party took the decision to amalgamate it into the Housing Strategy due to the cross-cutting nature of their content.

3.0 Consultation

- 3.1 If approved for consultation, the strategy will be sent out to a wide range of key stakeholder organisations including:
 - Registered Providers
 - Neighbouring local authorities
 - The council's Housing Forum
 - Other key organisations such as support providers and the voluntary sector
- 3.2 In addition it will be placed onto the council's website to enable public consultation.
- 3.3 The consultation period is expected to last approximately 8 weeks.
- 3.4 After the close of the consultation period, all of the comments and views will be incorporated to create a final version of the strategy. This will then be brought back before this Committee for consideration.

4.0 Review and Monitoring

- 4.1 This strategy is intended to provide guidance for the period 2012-2017. Officers recognise that the housing environment is rapidly changing, and therefore will closely monitor the strategy and update as and when relevant.
- 4.2 If any amendments are made, these will be communicated fully and a revised document issued.

5.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.1 It is essential that a housing strategy takes into account the housing issues and requirements of a wide range of households, including those within the equality strands.
- 5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment Screening has been undertaken, which is attached at Appendix 2. This has concluded that there are no perceived negative impacts at this stage.

5.3 We will be taking forward a number of actions as this draft strategy progresses towards a final version:

- Conducting a full Equality Impact Assessment on the draft strategy.
- Taking into account the consultation responses on the issue of equality and diversity.

5.4 The outcomes of these actions will be taken forward into a revised strategy, which will be shaped accordingly.

5.5 A full Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken at this stage, as officers felt that it would be beneficial to incorporate the consultation responses into this process first.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 All local authorities are required by law to have a Homelessness Strategy in place. This has been amalgamated into the Draft Housing Strategy.

7.0 Risk Management

7.1 The council has recognised that an increase in homelessness represents a risk to both community well-being and the financial position of the council. The latter is recognised via an entry in the risk register (ref 230). One of the actions agreed which will help to mitigate this risk is the production of a homelessness strategy.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with the recommendation to consult below. There will be some manageable resource requirements in terms of staff time associated with co-ordinating the consultation exercise.

9.0 Corporate Outcomes

9.1 The production of a housing strategy contributes towards the following Corporate Outcomes:

- Sustainable – Sustainable Development
- Sustainable – Strong Communities
- Healthy – Improved Housing
- Effective Partnership Working

10.0 Recommendation

10.1 The committee is recommended to approve the Draft Housing Strategy 2012-17 for formal public consultation.

(Reason: to enable officers to continue to work towards a final Housing Strategy)

Legal	Power: Housing Act 2004; Homelessness Act 2002; Localism Act 2011
	Other considerations:
Background Papers:	
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CFO	MO
	CX



East
Northamptonshire
Council

Draft Housing Strategy 2012-2017

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Issue	Date	Comments
0.1 – First Draft	07/2012	Draft created
0.2 – Second Draft	25/07/12	First draft amended to take into account changes suggested and/or agreed by the Housing Policy Working Party
0.3	10/08/12	Final Draft for Consultation

NB: Draft versions 0.1 - final published versions 1.0

Consultees

Internal	External
e.g. Individual(s) / Group / Section	e.g. Stakeholders / Partners /Organisation(s)

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Links to other documents

Document	Link

Additional Comments to note

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1. Introduction

I am pleased to present East Northamptonshire Council's Housing Strategy for 2012 – 2017.

Housing has a fundamental impact on our lives. It is not only a basic need; it can affect our health, our happiness, our employment choices, the educational chances of our children and our relationships with family and friends.

This strategy has been developed to address the key housing issues affecting everyone in East Northamptonshire. It covers a wide range of housing related topics; from new housing development to homelessness.

In the years since the last Housing Strategy was produced, we have seen a number of successful achievements. We have implemented Choice Based Lettings, significantly reduced the number of people living in temporary accommodation, and significantly increased the rate of new affordable housing completions.

However, pressures from an expanding and ageing population; high property prices in the rural areas; and an increase in repossessions as a result of the recession, among other things, mean that we cannot rest on our laurels. In fact, if anything it will become harder to address housing issues such as these as we go forward; with record pressures on public finances and resources and recession placing greater demands on the personal finances of residents

In addition, the housing world as we know it is changing significantly. The Localism Act 2011 saw the start of the biggest changes to the housing sector for decades. This combined with Welfare Reform has presented some huge changes, challenges and opportunities.

One thing that we do know for certain is that we will have to be more innovative in how we address our housing priorities. This will mean looking at new alternatives to tried and tested products and working even closer with our partners. **Despite the challenges, we remain committed to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a suitable and affordable property.**

We recognise that we cannot deliver an effective strategy on our own; and that we will need to work with a range of organisations, stakeholders, and of course our communities. We will consult widely on this strategy, and the responses will be used to shape the final document.

I hope that you enjoy reading this strategy and that you find it useful. We always welcome feedback, and contact details can be found in chapter 11 if you want to get in touch.

Steven North
Leader of the Council

2.0 Housing Priorities 2012 to 2017

Our vision is for everyone in the district to be able to access housing which is affordable, safe, and suitable for their needs and of a good standard. However we recognise that for some households there can be barriers to this; such as limited income, or a limited availability of certain types of housing in the areas where it is needed. Therefore we want to do as much as we can to provide solutions to these problems.

This strategy sets out a number of key priorities that we want to address over the next 5 years. These priorities are:

- Enabling new housing development which meets a range of needs
- Improving housing quality, including sustainability for housing at both the occupier and community level
- Delivering effective housing services and support

The tables below show what we plan to do during the life of his strategy to take these priorities forward:

Priority	Key Objectives	Actions
Priority 1 - Enabling new housing development which meets a range of needs	Maintain an accurate and up-to-date housing evidence base	Update the Strategic Housing Market Assessment in 2013 to incorporate census data at Ward level so that a more detailed local picture of need is established
		Undertake village housing needs surveys in line with the rolling programme
		Undertake individual town housing needs surveys when required
	Plan for housing growth	Continue to plan for sustainable housing growth through the new Core Strategy, and development plans
		Plan for additional Gypsy and Traveller sites where required
	Take forward a pipeline of new affordable housing developments, which meet identified local needs.	Work with partner organisations, such as Registered Providers, and Parish Councils, to enable appropriate development, including rural housing developments.
Seek an appropriate mix of house type and tenure on all new developments.		
Work with the HCA and other appropriate bodies to secure funding where required.		

Priority	Key Objectives	Actions
Priority 2 - Improved Housing Quality	Improve the design and quality standards of new housing development	Assess all new proposals for housing development against published design criteria.
	Improve the standard of existing housing stock	Commission a new Stock Condition survey, and seek to take forward any recommendations.
		Maintain the delivery of legislative functions to improve private rented sector housing conditions.

		Continue to deliver a range of home improvement initiatives, where funding allows.
	Reduce the number of empty properties in the district	Work with owners of empty properties to bring them back into use.

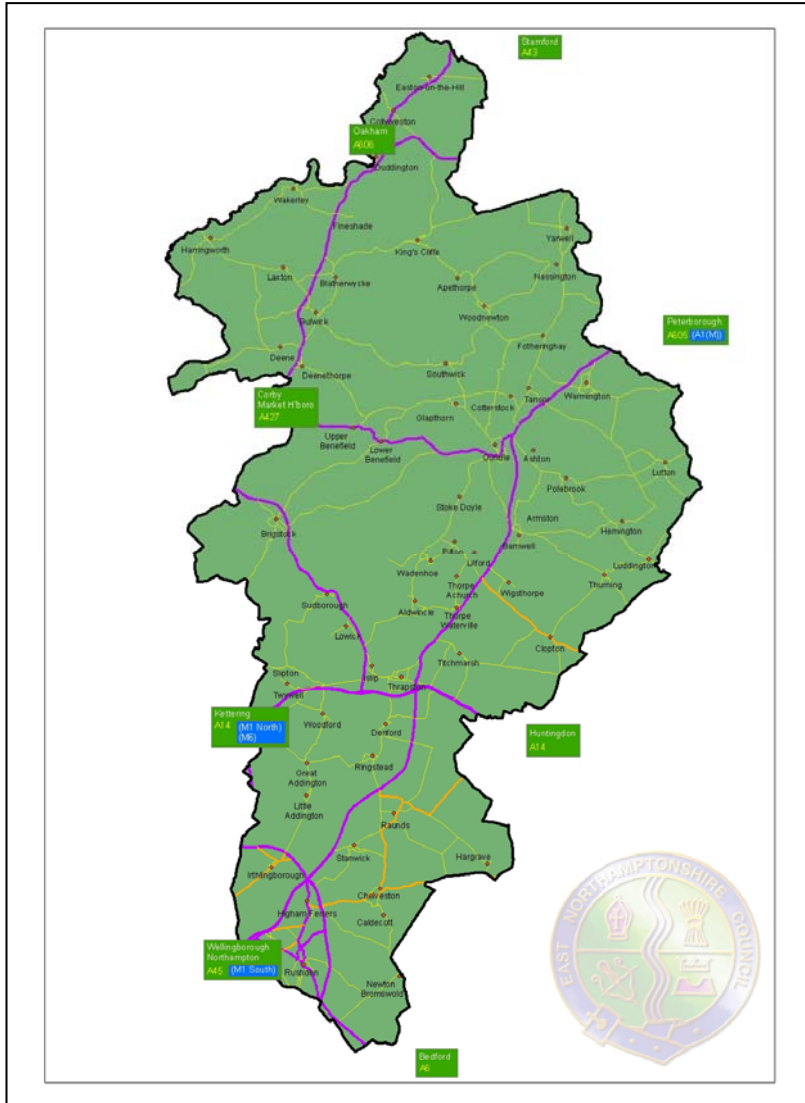
Priority	Key Objectives	Actions
Priority 3 - Delivering effective housing services and support	Deliver an effective front line housing service	Minimise the increase in homelessness levels.
		Continue to increase the number of homelessness preventions; by a minimum of 10% per year.
		Conduct regular customer satisfaction surveys of the housing options service.
		Work actively with private sector landlords, to enable us to meet housing needs via a range of tenure options.
	Support vulnerable people	Work to identify and support households affected by Welfare Reform.
		Continue to ring-fence the Homelessness Grant for the purpose intended by Government.
	Continue to support disabled people through the delivery of disabled facilities grants.	
	Work closely with the County Council and other organisations to take forward services under the new Prevention and Demand Management approach.	

This strategy provides further detail on the work we will be undertaking to achieve these priority outcomes, and provides useful background information for all of our partners and organisations looking to develop or deliver services in the area.

3. District Profile

East Northamptonshire is one of seven districts/boroughs within the county of Northamptonshire. It is predominantly rural, with widely differing characteristics in the North and South.

The North is made up of a network of small villages, served by larger settlements and the market towns of Oundle and Thrapston. The South has more of an urban feel; with the remaining four towns of Rushden, Higham Ferrers, Irthlingborough and Raunds.



The population of the district is 86,800¹; with Rushden the largest town of around 29,500 residents. There are approximately 36,800² households in the district.

There is good access to road links, in particular the A14 which provides links to the M1, A1 and A45 among others. A high speed rail link to London is available at neighbouring Corby, just a few miles away; and there are further mainline services from Kettering, Wellingborough and Peterborough.

In terms of deprivation, East Northamptonshire is ranked 269th out of 354 local authority areas³; where 1 is the most deprived and 354 the least deprived. Therefore on the whole it is a reasonably affluent district. However, there are pockets of deprivation in some of the towns; and there is also an element of rural isolation given the geographical nature of the area.

¹ Census 2011

² Mid 2010 estimate

³ Indices of Deprivation 2007

The district contains some stunning natural features and beautiful countryside, making it the perfect place to enjoy days out. Therefore tourism is very important to the area; and in particular local businesses. Some of the attractions include Stanwick Lakes, the River Nene; and the many country parks, museums and stately homes.

East Northamptonshire falls within the housing market area of North Northamptonshire; which is made up of the four boroughs of Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby – along with the district of East Northamptonshire.

4. Strategic Setting

In order to be effective, this strategy needs to be considered alongside a number of other national and local strategies, policies and legislation.

Government Policy

The Government's key housing policy objective is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community where they want to live. To achieve this, the Government is seeking to:

- achieve a wide choice of high quality homes, both affordable and market housing, to address the requirements of the community,
- widen opportunities for home ownership and ensure high quality housing for those who cannot afford market housing, in particular those who are vulnerable or in need,
- improve affordability across the housing market, including by increasing the supply of housing and;
- create sustainable, inclusive, mixed communities in all areas, both urban and rural.

Localism Act

The Localism Act (2011) introduced significant housing reform, which is intended to make the system of allocating affordable housing fairer and more effective; and to make it easier for decisions to be taken locally. The key features of the Act in relation to housing reform are:

- Allocations Reform – greater freedom for Local Authorities to set their own policies relating to who can go onto affordable housing waiting lists. This means, for example, that we will be able to prevent people who have little chance of ever securing affordable housing (due to low priority / need) from joining the Housing Register.
- Tenure Reform – under the previous system social landlords were only able to grant lifetime tenancies. The Act enables landlords to grant tenancies of varying length depending on people's circumstances.
- Homelessness Legislation Reform – under previous rules, people who became homeless were able to refuse offers of accommodation in the private sector. The Act provides the option for Local Authorities to discharge their homeless duty by way of an offer of private rented accommodation, where it is deemed appropriate.

The Act requires local authorities to produce a Tenancy Strategy, and will inevitably result in the updating of other strategies and policies – such as this one - due to the level of reform proposed; and the introduction of new flexibilities.

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012, and replaces a number of other planning policy guidance documents – such as Planning Policy Statements. It sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they are expected to be applied.

The NPPF represents a step change in the Government's approach to planning policy, by providing a less prescriptive framework for local authorities and communities to develop their own policies and plans. It covers a wide range of topics; including but not limited to:

- Town centres
- Sustainable transport

- The rural economy
- Good design
- Communications infrastructure
- Delivering high quality homes

The guidance in the NPPF will need to be taken into account as development plans move forward in the district; whether these be statutory Development Plan Documents or neighbourhood plans (see below). In addition the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions and therefore must be taken into account when applications for development are being prepared.

Sections 6, 7 and 8 are the most relevant to this strategy; however it is recommended that the whole framework is read in conjunction with this document.

Welfare Reform

The Government is currently reviewing the welfare (benefits) system, with the aims of encouraging more people into work whilst supporting the most vulnerable. On 8 March the Welfare Reform Act 2012 received Royal Assent. The Act introduces a wide range of reforms to make the benefits and tax credits system fairer and simpler by:

- creating the right incentives to get more people into work
- protecting the most vulnerable in our society
- delivering fairness to those claiming benefit and to the tax payer.

Some of the key features of the Act are:

Universal Credit - is a major feature of the Welfare Reform Act. It is intended to help claimants and their families to become more independent and to simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single streamlined payment. It will be launched in 2013 and will replace:

- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credits
- Working Tax Credits
- Housing Benefit.

Council Tax Benefit – this will be abolished and replaced with locally determined council tax rebate schemes.

Disability Living Allowance – this will be updated and will include the introduction of the Personal Independence Payment.

Personal Independence Payment - A key measure in the Welfare Reform Act is to replace Disability Living Allowance for eligible working age people (aged 16 to 64) with a new benefit, Personal Independence Payment, from April 2013. Personal Independence Payment is based on an assessment of individual need. The new assessment will focus on an individual's ability to carry out a range of key activities necessary to everyday life. Information will be gathered from the individual, as well as healthcare and other professionals who work with and support them. There are no current plans to replace Disability Living Allowance for children under 16 and people aged 65 and over who are already receiving Disability Living Allowance.

Housing Benefit Regulations – the most significant of the new regulations relates to ‘rent restrictions’. This means that housing benefit will be restricted to those households who are considered to have a spare bedroom, and are therefore under-occupying their property, under the Government’s definition of appropriate property sizes. Housing benefit will no longer be paid on the spare bedroom, which will mean that affected households will see their benefit income go down. This will be of particular significance for households who are claiming full housing benefit, and could lead to some having to move to a smaller house if they are unable to find another income source such as employment.

Welfare Reform has significant implications for this strategy, with some of the implications being:

- An increase in the number of households becoming homeless, or seeking alternative accommodation.
- An increase in the number of households requiring support and advice.
- Demand for some property types increasing or decreasing – ie more households seeking smaller accommodation.

Further information on Welfare Reform can be found on the Department for Work and Pensions website:

www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform

Corporate vision and priorities

Despite the current economic challenges, the council remains ambitious and wants to ensure that the district thrives and prospers. Three of the four key priorities agreed for the next four years are relevant to this strategy:

- **Sustainable development** – the demand for housing in this area has not gone away. We recognise the need for growth and the benefits it can bring, particularly in helping to revitalise our town centres, but it must be sustainable. We will aim to accommodate sensible levels of growth while preserving the character of our historic towns and villages.
- **Regeneration and economic development** – allied to growth must be improvements to the quality of our town centres. We will work with the private sector to bring investment into the area and to reverse the decline of some of our towns, particularly Rushden. We will continue to consult local communities about the changes that they want to see and work with them to achieve their aspirations for their local area.
- **Customer-focused services** – many of our residents and businesses routinely use the internet and we will upgrade our website significantly to provide better quality information and to enable far more transactions to be carried out online. We will also work even more closely with our partners, particularly the County Council, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable members of our community.

The council’s Corporate Plan takes these priorities forward and develops them into a set of priority outcomes that we are committed to deliver. The priority outcomes relevant to this strategy are:

- Sustainable development
- Strong communities
- Improved housing
- Strong strategic partnerships

The full Corporate Plan can be viewed at www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/corporateplan

Links to other Strategies and Policies

This Housing Strategy sets out the council's key housing priorities for the next 5 years. Some of these priorities are developed further in other strategies and policies. Those which are relevant to this strategy are:

Tenancy Strategy

www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/tenancystrategy

Empty Property Strategy

www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/emptypropertystrategy

Sustainable Communities Strategy

www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/sustainablecommunitiesstrategy

Housing Allocation Policy

www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/allocationpolicy

Private Sector Housing Grants Policy (Currently out for consultation)

5. Priority 1: Enabling new housing development which meets a range of needs

Priority	Key Objectives	Actions
Enabling new housing development which meets a range of needs	Maintain an accurate and up-to-date housing evidence base	Update the Strategic Housing Market Assessment in 2013 to incorporate census data at Ward level so that a more detailed local picture of need is established
		Undertake village housing needs surveys in line with the rolling programme
		Undertake individual town housing needs surveys when required
	Plan for housing growth	Continue to plan for sustainable housing growth through the new Core Strategy, and district development plans.
		Plan for additional Gypsy and Traveller sites where required
	Take forward a pipeline of new affordable housing developments, which meet identified local needs.	Work with partner organisations, such as Registered Providers, and Parish Councils, to enable appropriate development, including rural housing developments.
	Seek an appropriate mix of house type and tenure on all new developments.	
	Work with the HCA and other appropriate bodies to secure funding where required.	

Housing Needs and Housing Markets

Understanding the housing needs of an area is crucial to being able to deliver the right types of housing, in the right places.

All new residential development in East Northamptonshire; for market, affordable or specialist housing, is guided by housing needs evidence. This helps to determine the 'housing mix', ie what size and tenure of housing is required. The evidence is continually monitored to ensure that it is up-to-date and fit for purpose.

There are a number of different sources of housing needs information, the key ones being:

- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- District Wide Housing Needs Survey
- Local or Village Housing Needs Survey
- Housing Register Information / Lettings Analysis

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs) were initiated by the Government in 2006, as a way of providing an evidence base for local planning documents and housing strategies. They are not intended to be a definitive estimate of demand and need, but more a consideration of the characteristics of a market and how it is likely to change in the medium to long term.

They differ from traditional housing needs surveys, as they look at market housing requirements and demand issues; in addition to affordable housing need.

There are a number of required core outputs from an SHMA, which include:

- Estimates of current dwellings in terms of size, type, condition, tenure
- Analysis of past and current housing market trends, and key drivers underpinning the housing market
- Estimate of current number of households in housing need
- Estimate of future households requiring market and affordable housing
- Estimate of the sizes of housing required
- Estimate of household groups who have particular housing requirements, for example gypsies and travellers.

All local authorities are required to undertake SHMAs, which should be monitored annually and updated every 3 to 5 years.

A SHMA was completed for the North Northamptonshire housing market area⁴ in 2007 and has been refreshed during 2012 to ensure that it is up to date and satisfies the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework. The full reports are available on the Council's website⁵.

The SHMA has provided us with a wide range of useful information and evidence, the key areas being:

- Key characteristics of the housing market in East Northamptonshire.
- Existing provision; and estimated levels of new affordable housing required per year.
- Recommended targets for the level of affordable housing to be sought through new developments.
- House size requirements at individual Ward level will be available when the Census 2011 data is incorporated

Findings and recommendations have already been incorporated into the review of the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy; the document which sets out the overall strategic plan for North Northamptonshire (see section 4). The evidence has also been used to formulate housing mix and affordable housing policies for the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan. Information in the SHMA has also been, and will continue to be, used to inform actions in other areas of this strategy– such as plans for housing for older people, or rural housing.

Furthermore, the SHMA is also being used as a key evidence base for the emerging Four Towns Plan; the Development Plan Document for the 'south' of the district.

District Wide Housing Needs Survey

In 2004, a district wide housing needs survey was undertaken; with the main objective of determining the affordable housing needs of each settlement. The full report is also available on the Council's website.⁶

Most of the information contained within the report has now been superseded by the SHMA; however it is still useful as a general guide, particularly when considering individual towns and villages.

⁴ See chapter 4.

⁵ www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk / A-Z / H / Housing Reports

⁶ www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk / A-Z / H / Housing Reports

The Council is not planning to update the survey, as it is considered that the update of the SHMA is sufficient to provide up-to-date detailed information. However, one-off surveys may be undertaken for individual settlements as and when needed, for example, to inform particularly large developments.

Local or Village Housing Needs Survey

These very small scale surveys are most often used to plan for small developments; usually of affordable housing in villages. The approach to assessing the affordable housing needs of villages is set out below under 'Rural Housing'.

The surveys take the form of a postal questionnaire, which is delivered to every household in a defined area.

They are less robust for determining the housing needs of towns, for a number of reasons:

- Towns experience much faster movement of people in and out; and between properties.
- Towns naturally meet the housing needs of a wider geographic area; and not just needs arising from within its own population.

However, they can be very useful for building up a general idea of the level of housing need; or of the type or size of properties required. Housing needs surveys within the six towns in the district will be undertaken if and when it is felt appropriate.

Housing Surgeries

Housing 'surgery' sessions provide an opportunity for residents to discuss on a one-to-one basis specific housing need issues. To date these have only been used in villages, where they have increased understanding of what makes rural communities more sustainable and helped to build up a up-to-date picture of what type of accommodation the village needs.

Housing Register Information / Lettings Analysis

The housing register (waiting list) can be a very useful source of information relating to need and demand. In particular analysis can determine:

- The number of households registered as seeking affordable housing in a specific town or village
- The type of accommodation required – for example, how many households seek 3 bedroom houses.
- The number of applicants for each individual advertised property, and where they currently live.

On it's own, it is not a definitive evidence base. However when combined with other information, such as the studies and surveys detailed above, it can help to provide a more accurate picture of need.

Housing Growth

North Northamptonshire⁷ is historically a key part of the Milton Keynes South Midlands (MKSM) Growth Area. The growth aspirations for the area can be traced back to the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan and the Regional Spatial Strategy; which both sought a step change in the rate of

⁷ See chapter 3

house building in North Northamptonshire to contribute towards meeting overall housing shortages in the greater south-east.

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS, 2005) and Regional Plan stated that North Northamptonshire should be able to accommodate 52,100 new dwellings, between 2001 and 2021. The revised Regional Strategy (2009) added a further 14,000 new dwellings onto this total.

The housing growth aspirations were taken forward through the current Core Strategy which was adopted in June 2008, and is currently being reviewed. The Localism Act makes provision for the revocation of the Regional Plan; the intention being for top-down regional targets for homes and jobs to be replaced by 'Local Plans' based on robust evidence and supported by financial incentives for communities to embrace growth.

When the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) is revoked, the revised Core Strategy will need to establish the appropriate level of housing for the North Northamptonshire Housing Market Area over the period 2011-2031, and the delivery trajectory to achieve this. Notwithstanding the Government's intention that housing requirements should be determined by local aspirations (supported by fiscal incentives) the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that this should be informed by a robust evidence base. This is to include evidence of:

- Current and future levels of need and demand for housing and other relevant market information such as long term house prices; and
- Realistic assumptions about the availability, suitability and the likely economic viability of land to meet the identified requirement for housing over the plan period.

The North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit has consulted on the delivery of current Core Strategy housing targets having regard to the recession (Statement of intent on Housing Requirements December 2010). The response from the planning authorities suggested that an aspirational but realistic target of 41,000 homes would be appropriate for the period 2011 to 2031. This represents a step change downwards in the rate of delivery of housing development in North Northamptonshire, and even then its delivery is largely dependent on the success of the Sustainable Urban Extensions. Delivery timescales for the SUEs are currently under review and may result in changes to the forecast amount of housing that can be built by 2031. However it is probable that market demand will continue drive development within East Northamptonshire where the generally smaller sites (than SUEs) are considered easier to develop in the current climate as they do not usually have the large associated infrastructure requirements of SUEs. Sites to accommodate these minimum requirements and strategic opportunity targets have been identified at the Growth Towns and Market Towns in accordance with the overall spatial strategy. Development within villages and the wider rural area will be driven by local needs and aspirations expressed through site specific Development Plan Documents including Neighbourhood Plans.

Whatever housing requirement is established it will be necessary, in demonstrating the soundness of the Core Strategy, to show that it is deliverable in the light of existing commitments, infrastructure requirements, environmental constraints, potential market conditions and resources. The 41,300 figure used in the assessment of spatial options relies heavily on the implementation of Sustainable Urban Extensions at the three main towns of Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby. Separate work is being undertaken to review the deliverability of these major developments over the next 20 years.

The final agreed housing growth targets and associated policies will be published as and when the new Core Strategy is finalised and adopted.

The individual local authorities in North Northamptonshire, based on the framework provided by the Core Strategy, are preparing other more detailed plans for their areas; known as Development Plan Documents (DPDs).

There are two DPDs for East Northamptonshire – one adopted and one emerging. The Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan – covering the 'rural north' of the district - was adopted in July 2011 and

includes a number of housing policies, ranging in topic from housing mix to sustainability. The emerging Four Towns Plan covers the southern part of the district.

Gypsies and Travellers

Pitch Provision

The Housing Act 2004 placed a statutory duty upon local authorities to assess the need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in their area; and take forward the delivery of additional pitches to meet this need.

In response to this the seven districts and boroughs within Northamptonshire carried out a joint Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) in 2007; which identified needs across the County. This was subsequently updated in 2011.

The assessments sought to:

- Provide a reliable assessment of the need for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation at district and county level.
- Include the characteristics, views, and preferences of Gypsy and Traveller households.
- Be fit-for-purpose in meeting the requirements of Government guidance.
- Help identify unmet need for Gypsy and Traveller access to wider service provision (such as health and education), through the information provided by the Accommodation Assessment process.

The projects comprised three key stages:

- A review of existing literature and secondary data.
- Stakeholder consultation – involving representatives from the commissioning Councils, the County Traveller Unit, and the Gypsy and Traveller communities.
- Face-to-face interviews with up to 245 Gypsy & Travellers (initial assessment only).

Upon completion of the GTAA, a final report setting out the findings was produced⁸. The report sets out the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need for the County, and for each borough and district. It does not identify or recommend specific sites or locations; as this is the role of local planning authorities.

The current site provision, and additional pitch requirements up to 2022 for East Northamptonshire, is shown in the table below.

East Northamptonshire ten year summary (2012 – 2022)					
	Base Numbers 2011	Additional need 2012-2017	Additional need 2017-2022	Additional need 2012-2022	Numbers as at 2022
Residential pitches	36	2	5	7	43
Housing	0	2	0	2	2
Transit Pitches	0	3	0	3	3
Travelling Showpeople Pitches	6	2	2	4	10

The key points to note are:

⁸ www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/Housing/Reports

- An additional 7 residential (permanent) pitches are required by 2022; with 2 required by 2017. The report recommends that these should ideally be located close to existing provision, which is at two sites in Irthlingborough and Ringstead.
- Two families have expressed a need / desire to access affordable housing. This need can be met in the normal way through the allocation system.
- Transit pitches are pitches specifically designated for temporary use, for families passing through the area or visiting relatives. There is a need for 3 in the period to 2017. The report recommends, however, that no transit pitches should be developed until all of the need for residential pitches has been met. Delivering the transit pitches first could result in them becoming 'blocked' by travellers seeking a permanent site.
- An additional 4 pitches for Travelling Showpeople are required in the period to 2022.

Since the completion of the GTAA, the Council has considered the most appropriate option for delivering the additional pitches; and started work on taking this forward. As the GTAA report recommends that any addition provision should be close to existing sites, we have been exploring the possibility of expansion of these.

The Ringstead site has the most potential for expansion, and we have identified – through working with the owners – capacity to deliver up to 6 additional pitches on the site should they be required.

We will now need to turn our attention to the requirement for transit sites, which will be the focus of our work in this area during the life of this strategy.

Extensive consultation has taken place with the local community through Parish Council meetings; and further consultation will be undertaken as part of any planning applications that may be required for expansion.

Housing Needs

The majority of Gypsies and Travellers have chosen their nomadic lifestyle, and would much prefer to live in a caravan to 'bricks and mortar' accommodation. However, there may be occasions where housing is sought for various reasons – such as to ensure access to a specific service.

Gypsies and Travellers have equal rights to apply for social rented housing as non-travelling households; the process for accessing housing is detailed below.

Support

A 'floating support' service⁹ is available to Gypsies and Travellers, which is funded by the County Council. This service provides free housing related support to travellers at their place of residence.

This service is currently being reviewed, and there is a possibility that provision may change in the future.

Unauthorised Encampments

Unauthorised encampments are those which occur on land which travellers are not entitled to occupy; such as grass verges at the side of the road, or public open spaces.

The number of unauthorised encampments had stayed fairly static over the last 3 years:

2007/08	13 encampments
2008/09	11 encampments

⁹ See chapter (insert) – 'Vulnerable Groups'.

2009/10	11 encampments
2010/11	6 encampments
2011/12	5 encampments

The council works with the local communities and the County Council to ensure that occurrences are responded to quickly; and travellers moved on in a planned and measured way.

Affordable Housing

The provision of additional affordable housing is crucial in meeting the needs of those who are unable to afford open market or private rented housing. Affordable housing is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as:

“Affordable housing: Social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Affordable housing should include provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.

Social rented housing is owned by local authorities and private registered providers (as defined in section 80 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008), for which guideline target rents are determined through the national rent regime. It may also be owned by other persons and provided under equivalent rental arrangements to the above, as agreed with the local authority or with the Homes and Communities Agency.

Affordable rented housing is let by local authorities or private registered providers of social housing to households who are eligible for social rented housing. Affordable Rent is subject to rent controls that require a rent of no more than 80% of the local market rent (including service charges, where applicable).

Intermediate housing is homes for sale and rent provided at a cost above social rent, but below market levels subject to the criteria in the Affordable Housing definition above. These can include shared equity (shared ownership and equity loans), other low cost homes for sale and intermediate rent, but not affordable rented housing.

Homes that do not meet the above definition of affordable housing, such as “low cost market” housing, may not be considered as affordable housing for planning purposes.”

Confusion often arises over the terms ‘social housing’ and ‘affordable housing’. They have both been used in the past to describe all of the tenures above; however for ease of reference the term ‘affordable housing’ will be used in this strategy.

The Council’s strategic housing team works in partnership with housing developers, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and funding bodies; to take forward a pipeline of new affordable housing developments. Delivery in recent years, and projected delivery for future years, can be seen in the table below in terms of unit (housing) completions:

Year	Completions	Projected Completions
2004/05	69	
2005/06	54	
2006/07	42	
2007/08	128	
2008/09	9	
2009/10	120	
2010/11	78	

2011/12	51	
2012/13		70
2013/14		35

Projected completions from 2010/11 onwards do not include any sites where affordable housing delivery is expected to be secured through a developer contribution (commonly known as S106 sites). This is because it is very difficult to predict when such sites will be taken forward. Therefore it is likely that the actual completions will be higher than projected.

It can be seen from the table above that completions peaked in 2007/08, and then (with the exception of 2008/09) started to gradually decrease again. This is not unexpected due to the recession and the cuts in public funding for affordable housing. However we remain committed to retaining a strong pipeline of new affordable housing development.

Developments will be taken forward which meet identified local housing needs, using the available evidence base (see above, Housing Needs and Housing Markets). This evidence will be used to inform the number, type and tenure of all new affordable housing.

Affordable Housing Targets

In addition to sites developed solely for affordable housing, delivery can also be secured through developer contributions.

The table below provides details of the adopted affordable housing targets:

Document	Target	Threshold
Supplementary Planning Document on Developer Contributions – June 2006	40% Affordable Housing	Development within the six towns yielding 15 or more dwellings; or residential sites of 0.42 hectares or larger. Development in all other settlements yielding 10 or more dwellings; or residential sites of 0.42 hectares or greater.
North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy – June 2008	40% Affordable Housing (under review)	Refers to individual local authority development plan documents.
Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan – 2011, adopted	Up to 40% of the total number of dwellings proposed – the final proportion to depend upon specific site viability	Development sites of 15 dwellings and over, and on sites of between 10 and 14 dwellings outside of Thrapston and Oundle.
Four Towns Plan – emerging policy	To be determined	To be determined.

The affordable housing target formally remains at up to 40% across the whole district. However, we recognise that the differing characteristics of sites coming forward in the north and the south of the district mean that varying levels of affordable housing can be supported. In recognition of this, a review of affordable housing targets was undertaken in 2011 and the council signalled it's intent to move to a target of up to 30% on sites in the south of the district. It is therefore likely that this target will be taken forward in the emerging Four Towns Plan.

The Council will negotiate the level of affordable housing with developers as sites come forward, to achieve the maximum level. A major influencing factor on the resultant level of affordable housing on each site is viability.

Viability

Up until fairly recently it was acceptable for local authorities to set affordable housing targets which were largely based upon housing needs evidence.

In 2006, Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3, now obsolete) was published which introduced the concept of taking economic viability into account when setting targets. Paragraph 29 stated:

'In Local Development Documents, Local Planning Authorities should:

- Set an overall (ie plan-wide) target for the amount of affordable housing to be provided. The target should reflect the new definition of affordable housing in this PPS. **It should also reflect an assessment of the likely economic viability of land for housing within the area**, taking account of risks to delivery and drawing on informed assessments of the likely levels of finance available for affordable housing, including public subsidy and the level of developer contribution that can reasonably be secured.'

However, it wasn't until 2008 that this was really taken forward and tested through the planning system.

A High Court Appeal hearing took place in July 2008, Blyth Valley V Persimmon Homes; which ultimately found that viability should be fully assessed when setting affordable housing targets. Since then all local authorities have been undertaking viability appraisals when taking forward local Development Plan Documents.

Viability continues to be an important consideration in the National Planning Policy Framework, and references are made to it's significance in plan making and planning decision making.

The Council sought consultants to carry out such appraisals when putting together the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan, and will do the same for the emerging Four Towns Plan. In addition, viability is also assessed on a site by site basis as development sites come forward. This helps to set an appropriate level of affordable housing provision and other developer contributions; such as education and open space.

Housing Mix and Tenure

Proposals for new housing development are assessed against their ability to meet identified housing needs and demands, and to create a more balanced housing market.

The council has set a number of targets in relation to housing mix and tenure, based upon available evidence; such as that in the North Northants Strategic Housing Market Assessment¹⁰. The table below provides details of the adopted housing mix and tenure targets:

Document	Target
East Northamptonshire Local Plan 1996 Policy H4 (saved policy).	On residential development sites of more than 10 units, a variety of dwelling types and styles will need to be provided
Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan – 2011,	1. On sites of over 50 units, an even split between 2,3 and 4 bed house types;

¹⁰ See chapter 5

adopted	2. On smaller sites in Thrapston, a mix of house types to include mainly 3,4 or more bedrooms; 3. On smaller sites other than in Thrapston, a mix which includes mainly 1 or 2 bedroom house types.
Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan – 2011, adopted	Housing should be provided to Lifetime Homes standard and 5% (or at least 1 unit, whichever is the greater) of all housing on sites of over 10 dwellings should be designed as wheelchair accessible.
Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan – 2011, adopted	Affordable units should comprise 75% social rented and 25% intermediate housing, unless an alternative split is agreed with the Council in response to local needs.
Four Towns Plan – 2010, emerging policy	To be confirmed.

The target for the Four Towns Plan has yet to be drafted; and in the meantime applications in the south of the district will be assessed against the evidence base (see housing needs above).

The targets above also seek the provision of wheelchair accessible properties as part of new developments; to ensure that those in need are able to access such accommodation.

The Council is keen to explore and consider a wide range of intermediate tenure options, when looking at affordable housing provision. There are various different products available; all with the aim of helping households to make that 'step' towards buying or renting their own home. The following products have been delivered on sites in the District:

Homebuy (formerly shared ownership) – the most common Homebuy model is Newbuild Homebuy. This involves a household buying a certain share of a property from an RSL; and being granted an interest free loan from the Government which is re-paid when the property is sold.

Intermediate Rent – this is subsidised rent; usually at a level somewhere between social rent and market rent.

Rent-to-Buy – there are a number of different variations on this model; however most involve a household renting a property for a certain period of time – but with an agreement to buy after that period. During the rental period, a proportion of the rent is usually put aside

Low Cost Home Ownership - this commonly involves a private developer selling market houses at a discounted rate. It is not usually considered to be a form of affordable housing; and there is often no mechanism for retaining the affordability in perpetuity. There is no reason though why this tenure could not be utilised more often as affordable housing provision; provided that robust enough legal agreements are put in place.

The form of intermediate tenure will be agreed on a site by site basis, depending upon local need.

Delivery of Affordable Rent

The council welcomes the delivery of new Affordable Rented housing where this can enable development to proceed through harnessing grant.

We are undertaking modelling, using income data, to obtain an idea of what income levels are required for applicants to be able to access Affordable Rented housing where they are not claiming full housing benefit. This information will be used to inform our required tenure on new developments, and our response to conversion requests.

The provision of Affordable Rent through new developments will be considered on a site by site basis. It is not possible for us to publish broad guidelines for the district due to a number of factors:

- The ability of Affordable Rent to meet housing needs in specific areas
- Specific requirements for other tenure, such as Social Rent, in areas
- The developing or receiving RP for the units (not all RPs can deliver Affordable Rent – see 3.4 above)
- Any specific local circumstances which may require the delivery of a certain tenure mix, such as housing management problems
- Factors specific to individual developments, such as viability.

Where homes are in settlements of less than 3,000 population (villages), we expect providers to deliver products which meet the requirements as set out in the local housing needs survey. Where a survey does not exist, we can provide local housing needs information based on analysis of a number of different data sources.

It is expected that Affordable Rent levels will be no more than 80% of market rent, and should not exceed the Local Housing Allowance for the relevant area.

Rural Housing

Affordable housing need is often most acute in villages and rural areas; and this is particularly apparent in East Northamptonshire, which is a predominantly rural district.

Despite the recession, property prices are generally still significantly higher in rural areas than in towns and cities. In addition average wages are generally lower making things even more difficult for first time buyers, and for households looking to move to family size properties. The situation is compounded by the fact that there tend to be high levels of owner occupation in rural areas which means that there is limited availability of rented accommodation either affordable or privately rented. For many households the only option is to move out of the village to secure suitable accommodation.

Recent Government reports and campaigns by national housing bodies have urged Local Authorities to put in place strategies to respond to housing need in rural areas.

The Matthew Taylor Report¹¹, published in July 2008, highlighted the key issues rural communities were faced with; including the lack of affordable housing, and it remains very relevant in today's market.

A number of the recommendations in the report focus on the role that the Local Authority should take in:

- Addressing the short and long term needs and vision for each village or parish for affordable housing.
- Developing options for working with local partners to explore the potential for bringing forward affordable housing schemes on Exception Sites.

The Local Picture

There are 51 villages in East Northamptonshire, varying in size from populations of 44 to 1,948. The majority of the villages are located in the northern part of the district, above the A14.

The shortage of rural affordable homes in East Northamptonshire is demonstrated in the table below. This illustrates the absence of any affordable homes in 17 parishes, and the very limited provision in many other parishes.

¹¹ 'Living Working Countryside'; Matthew Taylor MP, July 2008.

Affordable Housing by Parish	Number of Parishes
No affordable homes	17
Less than 25 homes	22
26 to 50 homes	1
51 to 75 homes	3
76 to 100 homes	3
100+ homes(not including towns)	3

The Council has in the last two years put in place a number of key measures to both identify the need for and promote the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas. These include:

- **A Rolling Programme of Housing Need Surveys**

Housing need surveys provide a comprehensive picture of housing requirements at a local level. The results are not only useful to inform affordable housing requirements, but also provide an indicator of requirements for open market housing. A rolling programme of surveys was introduced in 2010 which aims to survey 10 villages each year, and all villages within five years. Maps showing villages surveyed to date and the current year's programme can be accessed via the council's website¹².

- **Housing Surgeries**

Village 'surgery' sessions provide an opportunity for residents to discuss on a one-to-one basis specific housing need issues. This has increased understanding of what makes rural communities more sustainable and helps to build up a up to date picture of what type of accommodation the village needs. For example it is now recognised that although there may be limited facilities in a village, there may still be a need for more small open market dwellings so that older home owners who want to stay in the village can downsize.

- **Rural Housing Protocol**

The Council has signed up to a new county-wide partnership protocol¹³, which sets out how we assess and meet rural affordable housing need. This document emphasises the importance of key partners working together and builds on the procedures already in place. It highlights the importance of the Parish Council being involved in the process and how affordable housing schemes can be an asset to the Parish.

All new rural affordable housing development, and particularly that on exception sites¹⁴, will be taken forward in accordance with the protocol.

- **Financial Viability**

To ensure that the Council can seek to secure it's specified tenure split and household mix on new developments in rural areas robust processes for assessing financial viability have been established.

¹² http://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.aspx?documentID=1083&pageNumber=1

¹³ http://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/site/scripts/download_info.aspx?downloadID=846&fileID=2904

¹⁴ Exception sites - sites outside of the village boundary, for which permission to develop would not normally be granted.

- **Joint Strategic Working**

A joint approach by Planning Policy, Development Control and Housing Services has led to the streamlining of processes for pre-planning advice and to the establishment of a matrix for appraising potential sites.

Rural Affordable Housing Development

Rural development opportunities are inevitably limited and there are often many obstacles to delivering schemes. Lack of suitable sites, finding willing landowners, local opposition, financial viability, lack of funding and planning constraints are examples of constraints. The Council has a statutory duty to assess need, and is committed to working towards ensuring that the housing needs of the community can be addressed.

The measures outlined above have helped to bring forward new affordable housing in the villages of Nassington, Easton-On-The Hill, Kings Cliffe, Woodford and Lutton. Further developments are currently being progressed in Barnwell, Collyweston, Yarwell and Thurning. All of these schemes have a local lettings policy which ensures that the accommodation is specifically ring-fenced in perpetuity for people with a defined local connection.

The current economic climate means that limited numbers of properties are going to be made available in rural areas through developer contributions, and therefore the success of the rural housing programme is largely dependant on exception site development. Further guidelines in relation to the criteria for acceptable exception site development can be found at Policy 14 of the Rural North Oundle and Thrapston Plan (RNTOP) – one of the Council’s development plan documents¹⁵.

The National Planning Policy Framework recognises the need to be responsive to local circumstances and suggests that as part of any exception site policy, local planning authorities should consider whether allowing some market housing would facilitate the provision of significant additional affordable housing to meet local needs. This policy change may provide new opportunities for the delivery of rural housing in East Northamptonshire.

Funding and Resources

Homes and Communities Agency

The primary source of funding for new affordable housing has remains, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The HCA was formerly known as the Housing Corporation.

The HCA was formed on 1 December 2008 through the transfer of the functions and assets of English Partnerships; the investment functions of the Housing Corporation; a number of delivery programmes from Communities and Local Government and the transfer of the Academy for Sustainable Communities.

The statutory objectives of the HCA, as listed in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 are to:

- improve the supply and quality of housing in England
- secure the regeneration or development of land or infrastructure in England

* The National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) paragraph 5.4

¹⁵ RNOTP - <http://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents.aspx?categoryID=856>

- support in other ways the creation, regeneration or development of communities in England or their continued well-being
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and good design in England, with a view to meeting the needs of people living in England.

It is a National non-departmental public body; with responsibility for a wide range of funding programmes, including:

- Affordable Homes Programme
- Get Britain Building
- Community Right To Build
- Empty Homes Programme

The main and largest funding programme is the Affordable Homes Programme, which aims to increase the supply of new affordable homes in England.

Throughout 2011-15, the HCA has committed to invest £4.5bn in affordable housing through the Affordable Homes Programme and existing commitments from the previous programmes. The HCA expects this funding to deliver 80,000 new homes.

Local Authority Funding

In previous years the Council has maintained a capital budget for affordable housing provision; to compliment HCA funding, or provide funding where the HCA is not able to.

However, the current period of local government austerity has meant that all non-essential expenditure has had to be reviewed. As a result there will be no local authority funding available for affordable housing for the foreseeable future; apart from the recycling of a modest amount received through S106¹⁶ contributions.

Meeting housing needs remains a key strategic priority however, and we will retain a strong enabling role to help lever in HCA funding and secure affordable housing through developer contributions.

¹⁶ S106 – See definitions.

6. Priority 2: Improved Housing Quality

Priority	Key Objectives	Actions
Priority 2 - Improved Housing Quality	Improve the design and quality standards of new housing development	Assess all new proposals for housing development against published design criteria.
	Improve the standard of existing housing stock	Commission a new Stock Condition survey, and seek to take forward any recommendations.
		Maintain the delivery of legislative functions to improve private rented sector housing conditions.
	Reduce the number of empty properties in the district	Continue to deliver a range of home improvement initiatives, where funding allows.
		Work with owners of empty properties to bring them back into use.

Design and Quality

Well designed and good quality housing can make a massive difference to the people living in it; and the surrounding communities. For example, good design can substantially reduce crime; and the condition of a house can greatly affect the health of its occupants. We believe that having well designed housing, which is of a good quality, is just as important as affordability and availability.

New Housing

All proposals for new housing in the district are subjected to an assessment by our Design Officer; who looks at the following aspects:

- General layout, design and materials – advice is provided on all of these areas to applicants to help take forward a good quality development.
- Building for Life (BfL) assessments are carried out on developments including 10 or more residential units. There are 20 BfL criteria, set by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)¹⁷ – looking at areas ranging from character to parking. The North Northants Sustainable Design SPD (see below) sets out an aspiration for major developments to achieve a minimum of 14/20 under Building for Life. The councils design officer is fully trained and accredited to carry out these appraisals; and once completed a score is given. This score is taken into account when assessing new planning applications.
- Secured by Design¹⁸ focuses on crime prevention at the design, layout and construction stages of homes and commercial premises. It is a set of standards and measures, which when applied can dramatically reduce the risk of crime in new developments. The SbD initiative is led by the Police, and there is a local SbD officer for most areas of the country. The councils Design Officer works closely with the SbD officer to look how new developments adhere to the standards.
- Construction methods – the council actively encourages developers to look at employing innovative and efficient building methods; often referred to as ‘Modern Methods of Construction’.

Design and quality targets and aspirations - including minimum requirements that developers must adhere to - are set out in a number of key documents, all of which are available on the council’s website. These are:

¹⁷ www.cabe.org.uk

¹⁸ www.securedbydesign.com

- North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy – Policies 13, 14 and 15.
- Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan – Policies 6, 12, 15, 23, OUN3 and OUN4.
- North Northamptonshire Sustainable Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)
- Planning Out Crime Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)

Stock Condition

All councils have a responsibility to monitor the condition of all housing stock in their area. The most effective and most common way of doing this is through a stock condition survey. The last survey was carried out in 2005; and some of the key findings are set out below:

- East Northamptonshire has stock that is generally more modern than is the case nationally; with many dwellings having been built since 1964. Only the rural areas and Oundle have significant levels of older housing stock.
- The majority of private sector dwellings (almost 79%) are owner occupied, compared to just 70% in England.
- 7.4% of the stock i.e. 2200 homes (as at 2005) fail to meet the minimum standard as they contain 1 or more category 1 hazard. As can be expected the older dwellings (i.e. pre 1900) have the highest failure rate, along with converted flats. All of these dwellings are within the private sector.
- Affordability of repairs and maintenance may be difficult for residents who are equity rich, but cash poor. This is likely to be the case for a large number of people in the district – given the high number of older people (on low or no incomes) and owner occupiers.

We will commission a new stock condition survey during the next 12 to 18 months to update the information. In addition, we will work with private landlords to encourage and assist with the improvement of private rented accommodation.

The council delivers a range of home improvement grants and initiatives - in response to the findings set out above- which aim to improve the condition and quality of peoples homes. These are:

- The County-wide Insulation Scheme.
- Grants and advice for renewable technologies
- The Warmfront scheme

Further information relating to these can be found on the council's website at www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk; under the private sector housing section.

Empty Properties

Bringing empty properties back into use is a sustainable way to meet housing demand and can also regenerate surrounding communities.

Empty properties are a visible part of a community and when not looked after often stand out and can become a magnet for crime and/or anti social behaviour, which can affect the perception of the area by residents and visitors. We also recognise that an empty property can be very distressing for neighbours, due to the risk of them falling into disrepair, increasing crime or anti social behaviour, devaluing homes and having a negative visual impact on the area. Residents who live next to or are attached to the empty property can feel vulnerable and fear damage to their property. Owners of these properties often live elsewhere, which means they do not experience the direct negative impacts of an empty home.

In December 2010, Council Tax information indicated that there were 1391 empty

properties of which 687 were long term empty properties, i.e. empty for more than 6 months. A new Empty Property Strategy was published by the council in May 2012, which is available via the following link:

http://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/downloads/Empty_Property_Strategy_2012.pdf

This strategy looks at all empty properties that are recorded by the local authority through complaints and via the council tax system, and clarifies ways in which we as a Council will deal with empty properties, complaints relating to empty properties and ways of bringing them back into use.

The outcomes of the strategy are to:

- Work with owners to bring the empty properties back into use
- Reduce the number of long term empty properties from the council tax list
- Develop initiatives and assistance for owners of empty properties

We take a proactive approach in working with property owners. We aim to bring properties back into use through negotiation with the owners, however there may be some circumstances where the property is causing a concern or where the owner will not or is unable to co-operate with us and we have to consider the use of the powers available to us to ensure a resolution to the problem. We only use our legal powers as a last resort when all other attempts at informal action has failed.

In March 2011 a Joint Empty Property Project was set up with Corby Borough Council following an allocation of funding to tackle long term empty properties from central government. This project has proven to be successful in bringing long term empty properties back into use with over 50 properties being brought back into use in its first year. The project shares a specialist in empty properties who works directly with the owners to understand why they are empty and how we can assist them in bringing them back into use.

7. Priority 3: Delivering effective housing services and support

Priority	Key Objectives	Actions
Priority 3 - Delivering effective housing services and support	Deliver an effective front line housing service	Minimise the increase in homelessness levels.
		Continue to increase the number of homelessness preventions; by a minimum of 10% per year.
		Conduct regular customer satisfaction surveys of the housing options service.
		Work actively with private sector landlords, to enable us to meet housing needs via a range of tenure options.
	Support vulnerable people	Work to identify and support households affected by Welfare Reform
		Continue to ring-fence the Homelessness Grant for the purpose intended by Government.
		Continue to support disabled people through the delivery of disabled facilities grants.
		Work closely with the County Council and other organisations to take forward services under the new Prevention and Demand Management approach.

Homelessness and Housing Services

The council provides a wide range of services for people who are homeless, or in need of more affordable accommodation. These services range from taking and assessing homelessness applications to providing advice on a number of different housing options.

There are 3 main elements to this:

1. Homelessness
2. Housing Advice
3. Choice Based Lettings (applying for housing)

All of these services are provided by a dedicated housing options team – Homes Direct - based in Rushden and working on behalf of the council. The council has chosen to 'outsource' this front line service, and it is currently run by an organisation called Midland Heart under a contract.

Homelessness

There are a number of different factors that determine whether a person is homeless. Under section 175 of the 1996 Housing Act, a person is homeless if he or she has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere which is available for his or her occupation and which that person has a legal right to occupy. A person is also homeless if he or she has accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or the accommodation is a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation (such as a caravan or house boat) and there is no place where it can be placed in order to provide

accommodation. A person who has accommodation is to be treated as homeless where it would not be reasonable for him or her to continue to occupy that accommodation.

Levels

Levels of homelessness in the district are monitored quarterly – for our own records and for reporting to Government.

Homelessness applications and acceptances for the last 5 years are shown below:

Year	Applications	Acceptances
2011/12	150	64
2010/11	123	53
2009/10	89	55
2008/09	128	65
2007/08	186	102
2006/07	171	78

The table shows that with the exception of a slight increase during 2007/08, homeless levels fell steadily between 2005 and 2009. During 2009/10 there were almost half as many applications as there were in 2006/07. However the number of people presenting as homeless (applications) started to increase and continues to do so during 2012. This is most likely to be attributable to the economic climate; particularly when looking at some of the reasons for homelessness set out below.

The council's Housing Allocation Policy¹⁹ gives priority to applicants who have been accepted as at risk of homelessness; which enables them to access housing quickly, often before homelessness occurs.

Reasons

There are many reasons why someone may become homeless. The table below shows the homelessness acceptances over the last 3 years in relation to each reason:

Reason	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	17	10	14
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	6	4	2

¹⁹ See http://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.aspx?documentID=403

Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner	4	9	5
Violence	7	11	8
Harassment, threats or intimidation	1	0	1
Mortgage arrears	6	2	3
Rent arrears	4	0	0
Loss of rented or tied accommodation	15	14	20
Left an institution or LA care	1	1	1
Other reason for loss of last settled home	3	2	1
TOTAL	64	53	55

It can be seen from this that the pre-dominant reasons for homelessness over the last 3 years are 'parents no longer willing or able to accommodate' and 'loss of rented or tied accommodation'.

The services in place to respond to homelessness are set out below.

Services

As mentioned above, the key aim of the service in relation to homelessness is prevention. Much of the activity, and many of the initiatives, that the housing options team are engaged in attempts to prevent households from becoming homeless.

Data on the number of 'preventions' has only been collated in recent years. During 2008/09, 36 households were prevented from becoming homeless as a direct result of intervention by the homeless team. This increased to 143 in 2009/10, and then to 148 in 2010/11. It is our intention to continue to increase the number of preventions each year.

Preventative activity and initiatives include:

- Advice and support – this can be accessed by visiting the housing options team in Rushden, on the phone, or via a home visit. In addition there is a wealth of information on the council's website²⁰, and the Homes Direct website.²¹
- Mediation – a free mediation service is available; which can be particularly valuable in helping to prevent family breakdown.

²⁰ www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk

²¹ www.homesdirect.org.uk

- Floating Support – a free support service is available, which provides support to people in their own homes. This can help prevent homelessness through for example debt advice.
- Sanctuary Project – this service provides funding for, and undertakes the work, to increase the security of the properties of victims of domestic violence. This can range from better locking systems, to the creation of a full ‘panic room’ – a secure area within a house which can be sealed off in case of emergency.
- School Visits – the housing options team regularly visit local schools to raise awareness of homelessness issues.
- Rent Advance Scheme – provides first months rent as an interest-free loan, to enable applicants to access private rented accommodation.

As a result of the recession, the Government has launched a number of specialist initiatives, to respond to the increase in the number of households at risk of losing their homes. Whilst in East Northamptonshire the actual number of people becoming homeless through repossession has not increased; we know that this statistic hides the true extent of the problem.

All mortgage lenders are required by law to notify local authorities when they initiate repossession proceedings. The council has been monitoring the number of these notices that come in. The number of repossession notices received has stayed broadly the same since 2009, at around 150-160 per year. This level of repossessions however tells us that mortgage arrears and repossession is a significant issue in the district.

The two key initiatives to respond to this are:

- **The Mortgage Rescue Scheme** enables a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) to step in and purchase a property, where the homeowner is facing repossession. This initiative is delivered by the council, in partnership with the housing options team and the Citizens Advice Bureaux.
- **The Homeowners Mortgage Support Scheme**, launched during 2009, is intended to help homeowners manage their mortgage payments. It is aimed at those who have suffered a ‘temporary income shock’, ie they have been made redundant or forced to work reduced hours. The interest part of the mortgage payment is frozen, significantly reducing the monthly payment amount for an agreed period. The majority of lenders have signed up to this, or a comparable scheme. This initiative is delivered directly by mortgage lenders.

It is not known how long these initiatives will continue, but the council will deliver the Mortgage Rescue Scheme for as long as there is funding available.

Where homelessness does occur, the housing options team take an application from the household, and assess the circumstances using homelessness legislation. Where all of the eligibility criteria are met, the council may owe the household a duty to provide them with permanent accommodation.

Accommodation

There are various accommodation options available for households who become homeless:

- Temporary Accommodation
- Permanent general needs accommodation (with or without support)
- Supported Accommodation

Temporary accommodation

Where a duty to provide accommodation has been accepted, but no permanent accommodation is available, it may be necessary to use temporary accommodation (TA). A number of properties have been made available by RPs for this purpose throughout the district.

The council monitors the use of TA as part of a range of local performance indicators. Information collected for this purpose shows that the use of temporary accommodation has reduced significantly over the last 5 years. There were 10 households in TA at the end of March 2012, compared to 50 at the same point in 2005.

Temporary accommodation may be necessary to keep a roof over someone's head in the short term; however, securing permanent settled accommodation is clearly the most desirable outcome for anyone who becomes homeless - and the housing options team helps such households to access general needs accommodation as quickly as possible.

In cases of an absolute emergency it is sometimes necessary to place someone into bed and breakfast. This is always the very last resort – used only when there is no other accommodation available anywhere. During 2011/12, only 6 households were placed into bed and breakfast.

General Needs (Permanent) Accommodation

There are 5,100 units of social rented²² accommodation in the district, not including supported housing (see below). There is a constant demand for any vacant units, due to the increasing number of people on the housing register. In 2010/11, only 416 social rented units became available for re-letting – less than 10%.

Households who are accepted as homeless have a higher priority over other applicants, and so are likely to be able to secure permanent accommodation relatively quickly. The application process is detailed below.

Supported accommodation

There are a number of supported housing 'schemes' in the district, which cater for varying levels of support needs:

High Street South, Rushden - 15 partially self contained units, for single people with medium to high level support needs. Support is provided on-site, 24 hours a day, for a wide range of problems – ranging from drug and alcohol dependency to mental health issues.

Shoemaker Court, Rushden – 15 partially self contained units, for couples and families with medium level support needs.

Park Road, Rushden – 9 shared units within the main house and 9 fully self contained units in a separate block; all catering for low level support needs.

Support provided on site is predominantly housing related includes:

- Tenancy management - such as paying bills, completing housing benefit forms.
- Accessing support, and forming links with other support agencies.
- Independent living – advice and assistance with lifestyle management issues.

The majority of referrals into supported accommodation are made through the housing options team and come from within the district, although there may occasionally be a requirement to house someone from the wider area.

²² See chapter 6 for definition

Rough Sleepers

The most visible and extreme form of homelessness is rough sleeping; defined as:

“People sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air (such as on streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters); people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations or "bashes)””.

Rough sleeping levels in East Northamptonshire have always been very low. Information provided by the Police and voluntary agencies in November estimated that there were three rough sleepers in the district.

Local Authorities are only required to carry out formal rough sleeper counts where the anticipated number of people sleeping rough is in excess of 10. Therefore formal counts do not take place. However, levels are regularly monitored and there are services in place to respond should the need arise - including a severe weather protocol which sets out multi-agency arrangements in respect of provision for rough sleepers in severe weather conditions.

There is one direct access night shelter in the district, in Rushden, offering 4 bed spaces. This accommodation, known as The Sanctuary, is provided by the East Northants Faith group as part of wide range of community services – including furniture and food recycling, and offering ‘drop-in’ advice and support.

Homelessness Grant

Since 2003 the majority of councils in England have received a grant from the Government, to help with homelessness prevention. For the last 2 years (2011/12 and 2012/13) the grant to East Northamptonshire has been £50,000. This is an increase from £30,000 in previous years.

The council, unlike most others nationally, has always ‘ringfenced’ the Homelessness Grant for the purposes it is intended; and used it to fund a number of worthwhile projects; ranging from the provision of a substance misuse surgery in Rushden, to an enhanced money advice service for households at risk of mortgage repossession. This ringfencing has meant that we have been able to secure an increase in this funding in recent years.

A significant proportion of the money has always been, and is likely to continue to be administered as small grants to organisations or groups for their projects. The full criterion for this is on the council’s website; but the key aim of any project must be to directly prevent or reduce homelessness.

Due to anticipated continued central cuts in public funding, it is not known whether the Homelessness Grant will be paid to councils in future years. If it is then the criteria for applying will be agreed and published each year.

Housing Advice

Not everyone who approaches the housing options team is homeless or in urgent need of accommodation. Some people may require advice, or signposting to another support service. The advice provided by the housing options team includes:

- Applying for affordable housing (see below)
- Debt advice
- Accessing private rented accommodation
- Illegal evictions
- Accessing support
- Housing benefits

The service is intended to be as customer friendly and accessible as possible. There is a central office and 'property shop' located in Rushden Town Centre at 50 High Street South. In addition the team can also be contacted by phone, e-mail or via the web – and home visits are available. Advice is also available at the council offices in Thrapston.

The housing options team and the council have a good relationship with local private landlords, to help housing applicants to access private rented accommodation where appropriate or desired. In 2009 the council launched a new 'private sector leasing' scheme in partnership with Rockingham Forest Housing Association. The scheme, called 'KeySolutions', allows applicants to rent a home under an assured shorthold tenancy in a very similar way to private rented accommodation; but for a period of up to 5 years. This gives greater security of tenure. In addition to this, there are a number of benefits to tenants of renting from a housing association; such as being able to have repairs done quickly, and having a guarantee of good minimum property standards. KeySolutions enables the Council to target areas within the District where there is high demand for accommodation but only a limited supply of rented houses for families in need.

Choice Based Lettings (applying for housing)

The third main strand of the service provided by the housing options team is the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) System. CBL is system of allocating social rented properties, which provides applicants with a choice in their housing options,

Instead of officers allocating available properties to the next eligible person on the housing register; vacancies are advertised and 'bid' for. This enables applicants to have an element of control over their housing choices; such as deciding which area to live in, and what type of property to bid for (within their eligible range).

Choice Based Lettings offers the following benefits:

- Increased choice for customers – applicants choose which properties to bid for.
- Transparent – it is easy to see how many properties are available and where they are.
- More informative – full details are published of all available properties; and feedback on allocations is provided.
- Increased control for customers – they are in the 'driving seat'.

The first step for anyone wanting to apply for a social rented property is registering on the council's housing waiting list; known as the housing register. Figures show that the number of people applying for housing is increasing. In April 2012, there were 1,190 people / households on the housing register; which is a 10% increase on the year before (1,084 at April 2011).

The exact reasons for this increase are not known, but there are a number of factors likely to have had an impact: the recession and subsequent continued rises in the cost of living are the most obvious and influential of these. Many households have experienced redundancy or a cut in their working hours which has affected their income; and in turn their ability to meet rent or mortgage payments.

Once applicants have been registered, they are given a banding and can then bid for available properties. There are 4 bands, reflecting the different levels of need. The length of time it takes to secure a property depends upon a range of factors – such as how many other people have bid, and what band the applicant is in.

Feedback on the CBL system since its introduction has been very positive. A customer satisfaction survey of the housing options service was undertaken in 2009, and the majority of respondents indicated that they were happy. For example, when asked how they would rate the service after contacting the

housing options team; 75% of people ticked 'good' or 'very good' – compared to 17.6% of people who ticked 'fair', and 6.2% who ticked 'poor' or 'very poor'²³.

We will continue to undertake regular satisfaction surveys to ensure continuous improvement of the service.

Allocations

All rented affordable housing in the district is allocated via the council's Housing Allocation Policy. This is currently being updated following the Localism Act, and the existing policy will be replaced with the new one when it has been adopted.

The policy sets out the eligibility criteria for applicants – such as who can join the Housing Register, and what properties they can bid for. In addition, affordability is also a key consideration due to the implications of the Welfare Reform Act, which have seen a reduction in housing and other benefits for most households who are or will be claiming some form of assistance.

We will be working to identify those households who may be affected by the Welfare Reform Act, and in particular housing benefit restrictions; and put in place support and advice where necessary. This may in some cases involve re-housing where the impact is significant.

The Localism Act also introduced changes to the types of tenancies that providers can offer, meaning that it is no longer just 'lifetime tenancies' that are provided when properties are allocated. Shorter, or 'fixed term' tenancies can now also be offered. In response to this, the council has produced a Tenancy Strategy which covers:

- What kind of tenancies to offer
- Circumstances in which the landlord will grant a tenancy of a particular kind
- Where a tenancy is set for a term, the length of term
- Circumstances where the landlord will grant a further tenancy on the ending of the existing tenancy

The strategy is available via this link:

www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/tenancystrategy

Partnership Working

To provide an effective housing options service, it is essential that we work in partnership with a wide range of relevant groups and organisations. These range from local community based services, to national forums.

Some of the key partnerships and groups include:

- East Northamptonshire Housing Forum – a district wide group consisting of both statutory and voluntary agencies; which meets quarterly to discuss homelessness and housing management issues.
- Northamptonshire County Homelessness Operational Group – a County wide group made up of a range of people involved in delivering front line services.
- MAPPA – the Multi Agency Public Protection Advisory Group, which looks at the resettlement of high risk offenders leaving prison.

²³ 1.2% of respondents gave no response to the question.

- Wellingborough & East Northamptonshire Community Safety Partnership - Domestic Abuse Delivery Group – this group meets to discuss issue relating to domestic abuse; and plan services to respond.

We will continue to participate in these important groups, and any others which we feel are useful.

Vulnerable Groups

Some people require additional support to help them achieve or retain independent living. This can be at certain times; or for some it could be for most or all of their lives.

It is estimated that there are 5,847 households in East Northamptonshire with one or more members in an identified vulnerable group.²⁴ This represents 17% of all households. Whilst this is lower than the average for the whole of North Northamptonshire of 18.9%, it is still clearly a significant number.

Evidence also tells us that households containing someone with a support need are also the most likely to be single person households – meaning that that not only are there a significant number of vulnerable people in the district; but also that in many cases they are having to cope by themselves.

Anybody can be vulnerable at any point depending upon their circumstances. Therefore as well as providing specialist support services, we want to ensure that housing related support is available to every resident in the district should they need it.

There are two main types of housing related support. These are **accommodation based support**, and **non accommodation based support** (this is often referred to as 'floating support').

Accommodation based support – is specialist accommodation intended for a specific vulnerable client group. For example, this can range from sheltered housing for older people to

Non accommodation based support – this involves the delivery of support outside of specialist accommodation; such as providing support to people in their own homes, or in a drop-in clinic environment.

The majority of housing related support services are funded by Northamptonshire County Council. Since 2009, funding housing related support services has not been ring fenced. Therefore, it has to compete with other local priorities and there is no guarantee of how much will be available year on year.

Prevention and Demand Management

Housing related support forms part of a wide range of support services currently being delivered across the county, which aim to prevent problems arising in people's lives or stop problems deteriorating further. Other support services include children's centres, youth services, crime prevention initiatives, and services for carers.

Due to ever increasing demands on the services, and big reductions in Government funding, the County Council is working towards a new way of commissioning support services. The new approach is significantly more area based; focussing on how the need of service users can be met across a locality – such as a local authority area., and how services can be more aligned.

The county council have stated that it will concentrate on commissioning prevention and demand management services which will achieve a range of specific outcomes, including:

²⁴ Source – North Northants Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2007

- Helping families and individuals to avoid a crisis that could lead to needing more specialist services.
- Targeting spending more effectively towards those on the edge of care
- Providing strong evidence of the impact that they have in reducing the need for specialist services

The new approach involves commissioning services in a different way, which will result in dramatically fewer providers and funding contracts. This will also mean that there is no inherent commitment of funding for certain historic services – particularly if these are not perceived to be effectively meeting identified local needs. This has the potential to significantly change the range and level of prevention services available in East Northamptonshire.

A budget, defined through a fair and equitable funding methodology, will be allocated to local areas; and organisations will be invited to ‘bid’ for this funding to deliver a range of services which can demonstrate that the general outcomes above will be achieved. A number of more specific outcomes will be defined locally and possibly delivered through one or more lead organisations.

At the time of writing this strategy the commissioning process is still in a consultation period, and so the scope and shape of future prevention services is very much unknown. The new contracts are anticipated to be agreed at some point during 2013. We will work very closely with the county council, potential lead organisations and local providers to take this process forward; and to ensure that as many local needs as possible can be met.

In the meantime, a range of services currently available are set out below - however it should be noted that these services may be removed or change in some way.

General Support

‘Floating support’ is available to all residents of East Northamptonshire, regardless of their personal or housing situation. This service, delivered by Bromford Housing Group, is provided to individuals or families in their own homes, and is completely free.

Floating support can, for example, be particularly helpful in situations where someone is struggling maintain their tenancy because they are going through a tough period in their lives. They may need help with paying their bills or mortgage; or it could be support as they move into their own home for the very first time.

In addition to floating support, there are a number of other services available to help households. These include:

- Advice and assistance available to homeowners facing repossession, as part of the wide range of housing advice services provided by the Council (see chapter 10).
- Households can apply for help in carrying out adaptations to their properties, to enhance their living conditions, through the Care and Repair service (see below).
- The Council offers a free mediation service, which can help in situations such as family breakdown or neighbour disputes.

Learning Disability / Mental Health

Mental Health

An audit of need and provision, carried out by Northamptonshire County Council in autumn 2009, identified 558 adults on the Community Mental Health Trust caseload in East Northamptonshire.

It is estimated that there is currently a need for 8 units of accommodation in East Northamptonshire, for people with a mental health need; which is forecast to rise to a need for 50 units by 2020. This may not

necessarily represent a need for 50 units of specialist supported accommodation; in fact it is anticipated that in the majority of cases, needs could be satisfied by delivering housing related support to people in their own homes.

There are currently only arrangements and funding in place for 9 units of non accommodation based support. This is delivered in the form of floating support – see ‘General Support’ above. There is no subsidised specialist housing provision available for this client group, although private accommodation is available.

Therefore, there is clearly a need to deliver additional accommodation and support provision for people with mental health needs. It is recognised however that this is a long term project, which is dependant upon available funding.

Learning Disability

The audit of need and provision identified 156 adults on the County Council’s Learning Disability Team’s caseload.

It is estimated that there is currently a need for 77 units of accommodation in East Northamptonshire, for people with a learning disability; which is forecast to rise to a need for 218 units by 2020. Again, this does not mean that by 2020 we will need to provide 218 units of specialist supported accommodation.

There are currently arrangements and funding in place for 14 units of accommodation based support, and 5 units of non accommodation based support. This provision will need to be significantly increased by 2020 if we are to meet the growing needs; however as in the case for mental health, this is a long term project and its success will depend upon funding.

The county-wide Learning Disability Partnership Board (LDPB) has recently completed a project to develop a Learning Disability Housing Plan. The purpose of the plan is to help people with learning disabilities, their families, and their carers to:

- Identify their housing needs and desires, in conjunction with other life aspirations
- Consider their housing options
- Plan to, and seek support, if they wish to move

Customers and their families and carers have actively co-managed this project; and are now taking the lead in implementing any required housing solutions. This will be done with the support of professional colleagues.

This approach reflects the move in recent years by public bodies to enable individuals and communities to have greater control in identifying and meeting their own needs; with local authorities taking more of a supportive rather than lead role.

By the end of the project it is anticipated that a range of new solutions, agreements, and methods of referral between partner agencies will be ready to implement. This will hopefully make it easier for customers to access housing and housing related support.

A website has recently been launched, as part of this project, to help people with a learning disability to access information about housing and support. This is at www.myhomemysay.co.uk.

For both of these vulnerable groups, those with mental health needs and those with a learning disability; there is a commitment at a county and local level to:

- Reduce the reliance on residential care, and replace with supported living models of care and accommodation.
- If appropriate, return people currently accommodated out of county to suitable local provision.
- Promote independence and allow people to receive appropriate support at home, rather than having to move to access services.

- Increase personal choice in how, when, and where services are provided.

Drug and Alcohol Dependency

It is difficult to know how many people at any one time are living with a substance misuse problem. Some people can manage their dependency relatively well; whereas for others it can have a massive impact on their lives – often leading to them struggling to cope on a day to day basis, or even becoming at risk of losing their homes.

Floating support can be accessed at any time to help people with drug and/or dependency to manage their housing situation (see general support above).

During the last 3 years, two additional services have been put in place:

There is a weekly substance misuse clinic in Rushden. This is a free drop-in service, provided by Wellingborough Substance Misuse, where visitors can access advice and support to help with drug and/or alcohol dependency. The clinic was introduced to ensure that customers in Rushden and surrounding areas can access support without having to travel long distances – which can often be a disincentive to seeking help.

In terms of accommodation based support, 5 flats have been delivered in Irthlingborough specifically for people undergoing treatment for substance misuse. These were completed in 2009 as part of the PHaSE (Positive Housing and Support Environments) project – a North Northamptonshire Initiative to deliver housing for this client group. Similar projects have also been taken forward in Wellingborough, Corby and Kettering.

The aim of the project is to provide medium term (6 months to 2 years) accommodation with support; to enable clients to adapt to independent living whilst at the same time completing their treatment project. At the end of their stay, they should be ready to move on into their own tenancy.

These two relatively new services will be monitored and reviewed over the next few years.

Migrant Workers

There is currently very little information available about the number of migrant workers living in East Northamptonshire. There is a general feeling that numbers have increased; however there has been no evidence or research to support this. All of the evidence is anecdotal, from noticing the increasing prevalence of non-English speaking groups emerging in our communities.

Migrant workers are often not aware that they may be able to access affordable housing; and most commonly end up taking whatever accommodation they can find. This is usually casual private rented accommodation; and is often overcrowded, overpriced or lacking in adequate facilities.

Homes Direct are able to offer specialist advice to migrant workers who are in need of accommodation. In addition, there are a number of organisations in the county, such as the Northamptonshire Race Equality Council (NREC), who offer a range of services; from advice and support to acting as advocates.

Ex-Offenders / At risk of offending

The council has an active role in a number of key local groups and partnerships; which seek to resettle ex-offenders back into the community in a sustainable way. These include the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) groups and the Prolific and Priority Offenders (PPOs) group.

Ensuring that there is access available to appropriate housing and support arrangements can often prevent re-offending. The housing options team visit local prisons to offer housing advice, so that ex-offenders do not become homeless the minute they leave prison. Once re-housed the floating support service (see above) can then help with tenancy management - such as paying bills, accessing employment and staying on top of paperwork.

During the life of this strategy, the council's Community Safety Team plans to fully review the services available in the area to ex-offenders; to ensure an integrated multi-agency approach. This means getting all organisations to work better together. For example, there are clear known links between homelessness and crime and disorder which need to be fully explored.

Victims of Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse is defined as 'any incident of threatening behaviour or abuse (Physical, psychological, financial, sexual or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender'.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact levels of domestic abuse in any given area, as we know that there is a significant level of unreported 'hidden' abuse. Between July 2008 and June 2009, there were 297 incidents of domestic abuse reported to the Police in East Northamptonshire – however it is likely that the true levels are much higher.

There are a number of services which are supported and / or funded by the council; which seek to help victims of domestic abuse. These are:

- Free and confidential advice services provided by a range of agencies.
- A number of shelters throughout the district.
- The 'Sanctuary Project' – carrying out home security upgrades
- Wellingborough & East Northamptonshire Community Safety Partnership – Domestic Abuse Delivery Group

A key dedicated front line response service is provided by the Sunflower Centre. There are two centres in the County, based in Northampton and Corby; which aim to provide advice and support to high risk male and female victims of domestic abuse. In 2009/10, the Sunflower Centre received 208 referrals from East Northamptonshire; and of these, contact was successfully made with 167 victims. Over half of the referrals, 118 victims, then went on to be supported by the centre.

There are two dedicated shelters in the district, provided by Women's Aid; located in Rushden and Oundle. These provide emergency accommodation with support for women fleeing violent partners; with or without children.

The Sanctuary Project enables victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes; through the fitting of additional security equipment. This assists in preventing perpetrators to gain access to properties whilst the Police are on their way. If necessary, this can also involve the creation of a 'panic room' – a safe and secure area within a property that can be used in case of an emergency; again whilst awaiting the arrival of the Police. The project enables adaptations to be tailored to the specific needs of the victim – what may be the right measure for one person may not be appropriate for another.

The project directly prevents homelessness, as it means that victims do not have to leave their homes; and creates a safe and secure environment. In 2011/12, 11 high risk victims received additional security measures. The project is entirely funded by the council; and there is provision for it to continue to 2013. It will then be continued further subject to funding being available.

The Wellingborough & East Northamptonshire Community Safety Partnership – Domestic Abuse Delivery Group is a multi-agency group, which seeks to deliver actions to reduce incidents of domestic abuse. The forum is made up of a wide range of organisations that are in contact with victims, including the council, and is currently working on a new action plan. The key objective for the action plan is to reduce

the number of repeat incidents; and the current target is that no more than 27% of all reported incidents should be repeat cases. The plan sets out a number of actions to work towards meeting the target, including:

- Obtaining more detailed and up-to-date information
- Raising awareness of domestic abuse, and associated issues such as alcohol abuse
- Securing further funding for enhanced services

Older People

According to the 2010 mid-year statistics, 17.91% of the population of East Northamptonshire is over the age of 65. This is higher than the average of England as a whole – which is 17.09%. As is the case nationally, the district faces an increasing older population. Population projections for the next 20 years show that the number of people over the age of 65 will have doubled by 2030. For East Northamptonshire the projected figure means that 31.62% of the district will be aged 65 plus. Of particular note is the increase in the number of people aged over 85 which will mean additional pressure on sheltered housing, care homes, support services and NHS resources. It is predicted that by 2030 the number of people aged over 85 will represent nearly 5% of the District's population.

There are a number of ways that we can respond to this, from increasing the supply of accommodation for older people and by providing appropriate measures to enable that they can continue to live independently in their own homes should they wish to.

To ensure that we provide for the future what older people require in the Autumn of 2010 we conducted a survey of older applicants on the housing register for East Northamptonshire. This survey has provided detailed feedback on both the profile of older applicants on the waiting list as well as their needs and aspirations. The full report of the survey findings can be accessed via the council's website²⁵.

Some of the key findings from the survey include:

- **Tenure Profile:**
Although 62% of applicants are currently in rented accommodation, 36% are home owners and have access to equity. This highlights the need to provide a greater range of homeownership options for older persons.
- **Reasons For Wanting to Move:**
The majority of applicants have lived at their current address in excess of 10 years and are not necessarily looking to move immediately, their application is part of planning for the future. The move therefore has to be right. 38% of applicants want to be nearer to family members and a similar percentage want a smaller property in particular a smaller garden. 21% wish to move for financial reasons as retirement brings with it a decrease in income. Smaller properties with low running costs are required particularly in the rural parts of the District.
- **Preferred Property Type:**
The overwhelming aspiration of applicants is for a two bedroom property and the preferred type is a bungalow. Similarly a high percentage of applicants indicated they would like to live in accommodation that is designated for older people with access to alarm and support services as and when required.

These results highlight that the stock profile of both open market accommodation and the affordable stock needs to more accurately reflect the increasing requirements of the older customers. Sheltered

²⁵ http://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/downloads/Final_Version_on_Report_of_Findings_of_Older_Persons_Survey.pdf

bedsits and small one bedroom properties no longer meet current expectations. For Registered Providers with older affordable stock which is difficult to let this strengthens the case for re-modelling. The success of the re-development of St Peter's Way at Irthlingborough demonstrates that demand for accommodation that offers independent living in spacious, purpose built apartments close to local amenities is an attractive option to older residents.

The dilemma of older homeowners who wish to downsize and who are struggling to cope financially in their homes (equity rich but cash poor) needs to be addressed. Signposting to alternative options for these homeowners will be a priority to help to reduce pressure on the waiting list; Development opportunities for the provision of more low cost homeownership options like LSE (leasehold Schemes for the elderly), where maintenance and repairs are taken care of and communal gardens are provided need to be explored.

For many older people "staying put" in their current home rather than moving is the right solution. The benefits of staying in familiar surroundings with an established support network are apparent. However, for independent living to be sustainable our home environments need to be suitable for our needs. The council offers and supports a range of services which aim to enable people to continue living in their own homes. Disabled Facilities Grants (see below) and the Care and Repair service can provide much needed assistance.

Care and Repair

Care and Repair East Northamptonshire and Wellingborough is a Home Improvement Agency which is based at the Spire Homes offices in Rushden. It aims to enable older people or people with disabilities to remain in their own home in comfort and security for as long as they choose.

In addition to council funding, the service is also subsidised by:

- Borough Council of Wellingborough
- Northamptonshire Primary Care Trust
- Supporting People
- Fee income generated from privately funded works

The Care and Repair team visit people in their own homes, to ascertain how they can be of help. They can provide advice and assistance on:

- Home Repairs
- Disabled Adaptations
- Benefits
- Energy Efficiency and Safety measures
- Possible Funding Sources eg. Local Authority Grants
- Paperwork – completing forms, writing letters, etc
- Referrals – to other organisations for assistance where appropriate
- Providing details of Contractors from an Approved Contractor List.

For home improvements and adaptations, the team also have technical officers who can oversee the works from start to finish.

In addition to the above, the service has recently been expanded to include a Handyperson scheme. This helps older and vulnerable people with small home repairs and jobs around the house, at a very

reasonable cost. There is also the added benefit of knowing that contractors have been approved; therefore reducing security risks.

Physical Disability

It is estimated that there are just under 4,000 households in East Northamptonshire with a physical disability²⁶, which makes this the largest vulnerable group. Having a physical disability can mean many things – from being reliant upon a wheelchair to having impaired vision. Many people with a physical disability will also generally be older; and their disability may be age related.

The council aims to ensure that there is sufficient housing and support available to those with a physical disability. We do this in a number of ways:

- Increasing the provision of fully adapted new properties – we have set a target for at least one unit within every development of 10 units or more to be fully wheelchair accessible (see chapter 6).
- Ensuring that support is available to help people to live independently. We do this by working alongside organisations such as Supporting People and support providers.
- Deliver a programme of Disabled Facilities Grants, to enable people to have the adaptations they need in their own homes.

Research has shown that adapting existing properties to provide appropriate facilities, such as level access showers and grab rails, can save huge amounts of money in NHS and re-housing costs.

The Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) programme is a mandatory grant which all local authorities are required to deliver. The grants are provided to meet the cost of adaptations, following referral from an Occupational Therapist.

The number of grant requests received is continually increasing due to the fact that the majority of applications come from older people; and the district has an ageing population (see 'Older People' above). During 2009 approximately 110 grant requests were received, which is double the number received in 2005. However, the council will continue to aim to meet 100% of the grant requests received, subject to funding being available.

Communities

Housing is not just about bricks and mortar; the environment we live in can make a huge difference to our lives. When choosing where to live, the community and local area is often just as important – if not more so – than the actual property.

The council is keen to build stronger community relationships, and has a dedicated Community Development Team in place to help deliver better outcomes for local people. Work on Community Plans will provide finer detail of housing need issues which can be reflected by Neighbourhood Plans exploring opportunities to provide housing developments to meet those needs. Registered Social Landlords are key to these projects, as they can increase tenant participation and also help to curb anti social behaviour.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) can have a considerable impact on the quality of people's lives. Examples of ASB include:

- Graffiti
- Under age drinking
- Excessively loud music / shouting

²⁶ Source – North Northants Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2007

- Swearing or spitting in the street
- Intimidating gang behaviour

The council has a dedicated Community Safety Team, which can assist in a number of areas; from taking reports of ASB and hate crimes, to advice on crime prevention. The team works very closely with the Police and other organisations, to reduce occurrences of ASB.

In addition there are three Police Safer Community Teams (SCTs), covering:

- SCT South (Rushden, Higham Ferrers and surrounding areas)
- SCT Central (Thrapston, Irthlingborough, Raunds and surrounding areas)
- SCT North (Oundle and surrounding areas)

Each of these teams has their own set of priorities, relating to the specific areas, which are reviewed every 12 weeks. The current priorities can be viewed at www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk, under 'Community Safety'.

The housing allocation policy²⁷ has recently been tightened up, to ensure that applicants with a known history of ASB cannot re-apply for housing. This sends out a clear message that those who lose their tenancies through such behaviour will not be re-housed by the council.

²⁷ See chapter 10

8.0 Equality and Diversity

East Northamptonshire Council is committed to providing high quality, value for money services for all members of the community based on fairness and equality. We recognise that different communities and neighbourhoods have different needs and we want to make sure that people are not prevented from accessing our services because of this.

All local authorities have a legal duty to ensure that their services, strategies and policies are fair; and do not discriminate against anyone. There are currently six strands of equality which are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Race
- Religion / Belief
- Sexual Orientation

As a mainly rural authority we are also taking steps to reduce disadvantage caused by rural isolation and social exclusion.

This draft strategy is currently going through an extensive Equality Impact Assessment process to ensure that there are no potential negative impacts on any of the equality groups. The findings of the assessment will be taken forward to shape the final version of the strategy; along with any consultation responses relating to equality and diversity.

The Local Government Association has recently re-launched it's Social Housing Equality Framework (SHEF); to help councils and housing associations ensure that they shape their policies and strategies to meet their obligations under equalities legislation. Council's can assess their draft documents and practices against the framework, to ensure that they would not have a negative impact on any particular groups.

An initial screening of the strategy against the SHEF has not flagged up any concerns; however we will be working to assess our full range of housing policies and strategies against the framework as these progress.

9. Consultation

We are keen to consult as widely as possible on this draft strategy; which has been sent to a large number of partner organisations; such as Registered Providers, voluntary sector organisations, and other local authorities. In addition the draft strategy has also been placed on the council's website for this period, inviting wider public consultation.

The consultation period will run from insert until insert; and a consultation pro-forma is attached at Appendix 2 to provide us with feedback. Alternatively you can contact a member of the team to discuss the strategy or provide comments, and contact details are provided below.

We will use the results of the consultation exercise to further shape and refine this strategy, resulting in a final document.

We welcome feedback at any time on this document, and contact details are provided below for this.

10. Review and Monitoring

This strategy is intended to provide guidance for the period 2012-2017. However, we recognise that periodic reviews and/or amendments may be required during this period. Therefore we may update the strategy from time to time as required.

If any amendments are made, these will be communicated fully and a revised document issued.

11. Contacts

If you have any comments or queries relating to this strategy, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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This strategy is available to download free of charge from our website.

Appendix 1 - Consultation Pro-forma

Please submit any feedback, comments or queries using this pro-forma. Alternatively you can contact us by phone or e-mail using the contact details above.

Name	
Organisation	
Email address	
Telephone Number	
Comments/Queries	
Do you require a response?	



East
Northamptonshire
Council

EIA Initial Screening Form – strategy

1. Name of Policy:	Draft Housing Strategy for Consultation
2. Name and Job title / role of person completing Initial Screening:	Cat Hartley, Housing Strategy Manager
3. What is the main purpose of the strategy?	To set out the council's housing priorities and activities for the next 5 years (2012 to 2017).
4. Who is the strategy aimed at?	House Builders, Registered Providers, funding organisations, Town and Parish Council's, other local authorities, the voluntary sector, the general public.
5. How is the success of the strategy measured?	<p>The strategy sets out a number of key objectives for the next 5 years. Against each of these is a set of actions – the strategic housing team will be monitoring progress against each of these actions.</p> <p>Some of the actions have corresponding performance indicators, where it is considered that failure to achieve would represent a risk to the organisation – such as number of new affordable homes delivered, or increased homelessness.</p>
6. Are equality monitoring systems for the strategy in place?	Not specifically for the strategy itself, however many of the actions have monitoring processes – such as the front line housing service.

7. Use the following table to indicate using a ✓:

- a) Where you think that the Policy could have a positive impact on any of the groups or contribute to promoting equality of opportunity or improving relations within equality groups.
- b) Where you think that the Policy could have a negative impact on any of the equality groups i.e. it could disadvantage them.
- c) Where you think that the Policy could have a neutral impact on any of the equality group i.e. no impact

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
Gender:				
Women/Girls			✓	
Men/Boys			✓	
Transgender people			✓	
Sexual Orientation:				
Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals			✓	
Race/Ethnicity:				
White British people			✓	
White non-British people (including Irish people)			✓	
Asian or Asian British people			✓	
Black or Black British people			✓	
People of mixed heritage			✓	
Chinese people			✓	
Travellers (Gypsy/Roma/Irish heritage)	✓			The strategy makes specific provision for assessing and meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers.
People from other ethnic groups			✓	

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
People who do not have English as their first language			✓	
Disability:				
Physical impairment, e.g mobility issues which mean using a wheelchair or crutches.	✓			One of the key objectives of the strategy is to support vulnerable people; which includes this client group.
Sensory impairment, e.g blind/having a serious visual impairment, deaf/having a serious hearing impairment.	✓			One of the key objectives of the strategy is to support vulnerable people; which includes this client group.
Mental health condition, e.g depression or schizophrenia	✓			One of the key objectives of the strategy is to support vulnerable people; which includes this client group.
Learning disability/difficulty, e.g. Down's syndrome or dyslexia, or cognitive impairment such as autistic spectrum disorder	✓			One of the key objectives of the strategy is to support vulnerable people; which includes this client group.
Long-standing illness or health condition, e.g. cancer, HIV. Diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy	✓			One of the key objectives of the strategy is to support vulnerable people; which includes this client group.

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
Other health problems or impairments (<i>please specify if appropriate</i>)	✓			One of the key objectives of the strategy is to support vulnerable people; which includes this client group.
Age:				
Older People (60+)	✓			One of the key objectives of the strategy is to support vulnerable people; which includes this client group.
Children and Young People (see guidance for definition)	✓			One of the key objectives of the strategy is to support vulnerable people; which includes this client group.
Religion/Belief:				
Christian			✓	
Buddhist			✓	
Hindu			✓	
Jewish			✓	
Muslim			✓	
Sikh			✓	
Other religion (including holding no belief)			✓	
Other Potentially Affected Groups				

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
Rural Isolation - People who live in rural areas e.g isolated geographically, lack of internet access	✓			The strategy makes specific provision for assessing and meeting the needs of households in rural areas.
Socio-economic Exclusion – e.g. people who are on benefits, have low educational attainment, single parents, people living in poor quality housing, people who have poor access to services, the unemployed or any combination of these and the other protected strands	✓			One of the key objectives of the strategy is to support vulnerable people; which includes this client group.
Any other potentially affected groups (<i>please specify</i>)				
8. If you have indicated that there is a negative impact on any group:				
a) Is that impact against legislation?	Yes		No	
b) What is the level of impact?	High		Low	
9. Could you minimise or remove any negative impact that is of low significance?	How?			
10. Could you improve a positive impact of the Policy?	How?			
11. If there is no evidence that the Policy promotes equality of opportunity or improved relations, could it be adapted so that it does?	How?			
Head of Service signature				
Date of Initial Screening:	6 June 2012			