

CONTENTS

Foreward by Councillor Ann Webb	Page 2
Section One: Introduction	Page 3
Section Two: The Council's Priorities in Context	Page 5
Section Three: The Housing Strategy Action Plan	
Priority One: Providing Affordable Homes	Page 14
Priority Two: Tackling Homelessness	Page 23
Priority Three: Supporting Independence and Special Needs	Page 31
Priority Four: Delivering Quality and Choice	Page 36
Priority Five: Enabling <i>Decent Homes</i>	Page 42
Priority Six: Sustainable Communities	Page 48
Section Four: Delivering the Strategy	Page 54
Appendix One: Glossary of Terms	Page 60
Appendix Two: Supporting Documents	Page 63
Appendix Three: Key Partnerships	Page 65
Appendix Four: Stevenage Housing Consultative Forum	Page 67
Appendix Five: Schedule of Affordable Housing Developments	Page 69
Appendix Six: Current Supported Housing Provision	Page 74
Appendix Seven: BVPI Table	Page 75
Appendix Eight: Contact Details	Page 78

FOREWORD

In 1997 we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the beginnings of Stevenage as a new town. Since then, two generations have grown up in our community and every year more people choose to make Stevenage their home.

As a town, we have a long and proud record of giving people from all communities good employment opportunities, a pleasant environment in which to live and, for those in housing need, a chance of a decent home. Indeed, it was in pursuit of this vision that modern Stevenage was built.

This strategy seeks to balance national and regional housing priorities with local needs, something we have been doing for over 60 years, and to which we remain fully committed.

At the beginnings of the 21st century we now find ourselves at a crossroads in our housing strategy. The stock of homes in the council's management has been reduced by fully two-thirds: we now have 8,700 left. This obviously has an impact on the scale of our operation. A more pressing consequence of this reduction has been the impact on our ability to meet housing need in the town.

We are currently conducting an Options Appraisal which is considering how best to manage our stock of homes. The outcome of this appraisal will have a profound impact on how services are delivered to our tenants and leaseholders, on how this strategy is delivered and on the council itself.

For this reason I consider this strategy to be a vital statement on our concerns, priorities and actions. I hope you find it interesting and informative.

Councillor Ann Webb
Executive Councillor: Housing

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Stevenage: a Snapshot

In 1946, Stevenage was designated Britain's first post-war new town. Its population has grown over the years and now stands at 80,000. Eighty-five percent of the town's 2,606 square kilometres has been developed, and about 8% of the town still remains metropolitan green belt. This means that the availability of green field sites for further development is extremely limited.

Stevenage, with its relatively young population, shows the characteristic age profile of a post-war new town. This distinguishes it from many of its neighbours in Hertfordshire, which have more elderly populations. The town has a density of 30.7 persons per hectare. This is higher than the national average for England and Wales, and is the fifth highest in the region.

Minority ethnic groups make up 5.4% of the town's population. (This is a 50% increase on the 1991 census findings). Asian (Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi) and Black Caribbean households are the predominant minority groups.

Levels of social disadvantage are higher in Stevenage than in the county as a whole. The percentage of teenage pregnancies, lone parents and children living in low-income households, are all much higher than the county average. The unemployment rate in Stevenage is about 3%. This is lower than the national average but compares unfavourably with the rest of Hertfordshire.

In the last 20 years there has been a housing revolution in Stevenage. In the 1980s, as many as 70% of the town's households were tenants of the local authority. The remaining 30% were mainly owner-occupiers. By 2000, this situation had all but reversed: 68% of households were in owner-occupation and 32% were living in social housing. During these years Registered Social Landlords took increasing responsibility for developing new affordable homes, and the role they play is now a significant one.

The Housing Strategy outlines plans and priorities for *all* housing in the town and develops a framework for those who provide housing in the social and private sectors.

In Section Two the background to the Housing Strategy is explored. This section sets out the background to the strategy, which includes the government's housing agenda, the regional/sub-regional context and the priorities of the town and council. It outlines what the council's priorities are; it explains how they were arrived at and how they are influenced by and inform the wider agenda.

The Housing Strategy Action Plan is discussed in Section Three and sets out the council's main housing priorities and its plans for achieving them. This section places these priorities in their local context, and provides an analysis of the current position.

Section Four, Resourcing the Strategy, considers the resources available to achieve the council's plans, and suggests areas of shortfall, which may prove a barrier to delivering them.

There are eight appendices:

- One: Glossary;
- Two: Supporting Documents;
- Three: Key Partnerships;
- Four: Stevenage Housing Consultative Forum;
- Five: Schedule of Affordable Housing Developments;
- Six: Current Supported Housing Provision;
- Seven: BVPI Table;
- Eight: Contact Details

Throughout the strategy, reference is made to the *Options Appraisal*. The main purpose of the *Options Appraisal* is to decide the future arrangements for managing and maintaining the council's stock of houses. The appraisal will also consider wider housing issues; these include the need to provide affordable housing, the role of supported housing and the future priorities and direction of the Housing Strategic Framework. The next section looks in detail at the background, purpose and timescales involved.

The council wants to consider all the available options in an open, town-wide debate. Until a firm conclusion is reached, it will not commit itself to any specific outcomes. In the meantime, it will continue to make progress on delivering its key objectives.

The Housing Strategy Action Plan

The Housing Strategy Action Plan is published as a separate document

SECTION TWO: THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES IN CONTEXT

Introduction

The Housing Strategy Action Plan sets out the council's key priorities for improving housing in the town. These priorities are shaped by a local policy framework (the Community Strategy, in particular) but are also influenced by national, regional and sub-regional agendas.

The National Housing Agenda

The government sets out its key housing priorities in its December 2000 statement, *Quality and Choice – The Way Forward for Housing*, which aims:

To offer everyone the opportunity of a decent home and to promote social cohesion, well-being and self-dependence.

The statement's key priorities include:

- initiatives to improve the quality of the housing stock;
- reform of the way social housing is financed;
- giving more choice to people in need of housing;
- measures to tackle homelessness;
- a focus on social exclusion and anti-social behaviour.

All of these are significant issues for Stevenage.

In February 2002, The Deputy Prime Minister launched the Communities Plan, *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future*. This document sets out the government's long-term plans for delivering sustainable communities in urban and rural areas. Its focus is on:

- addressing housing shortages;
- addressing the problems of low demand and abandonment;
- making sure all council and RSL (Housing Association) homes meet the *Decent Homes* standard;
- liveability (improving energy efficiency and the local environment);
- protecting the countryside.

Housing shortages, *Decent Homes* and liveability are high priorities for Stevenage. Protecting the countryside is less of an issue as the borough has a largely urban environment, and is only 8% green belt. Low-demand housing and abandonment are not problems.

The *Communities Plan* designates a number of 'Growth Areas' where additional new housing would be concentrated. Stevenage, along with its neighbour, North Herts, is in the London-Stanstead-Cambridge growth area.

Other national priorities affecting the Housing Strategy are:

- Best Value in Housing;
- *Supporting People*;
- Health Improvement
- Local Agenda 21;
- integrated transport policy;
- tackling social exclusion;
- equalities and the needs of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Community

These are referred to where a clear link exists with the priorities of this strategy.

Regional Issues: The East of England

Regional priorities are set out in the government's *Communities Plan. Sustainable Communities in the East of England*, published in 2003, takes these priorities and sets out the regional challenges for housing as:

- provision of additional housing for the region's growing population;
- provision of more affordable housing for key workers and others essential to the local economy;
- provision of more affordable homes in rural districts;
- making sure that all social housing meets the *Decent Homes* standard by 2010.

The East of England Regional Housing Forum published its *Regional Housing Strategy* in 2003 to 'integrate with the Sustainable Communities Plan'. Its vision, 'the sustainability of our communities and the environment they live in', will be achieved by:

- making sure that everyone can live in a decent home at an affordable price;
- contributing effectively to social inclusion;
- enabling housing to promote good health and health equality;
- ensuring that housing investment contributes to a sustainable environment;
- contributing to a sustainable environment.

The strategy recognizes a need to provide more homes 'right now'. It stresses the need for a 'step change' to double the planned number of new affordable homes and it also stresses the importance of achieving a *Decent Homes* standard to safeguard the stock of affordable homes for future generations.

Because the key housing issues in Stevenage reflect many of those found in the regional agenda, delivering the council's own priorities will contribute to wider regional goals.

The council has taken an active role in the publication of the Regional Housing Strategy and attended a consultation event in Harlow. It also submitted written comments, and contributed to a sub-regional response.

The Sub-Regional Agenda

The East of England Regional Strategy endorses the development of a sub-regional agenda. The council takes the view that this approach can contribute to solutions that benefit all communities in the sub-region, and strongly supports it.

Stevenage lies in the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region. This includes the 10 Hertfordshire districts, and also five Essex districts, which extend in an arc as far east as Chelmsford. Like the region as a whole, the sub-region has a mix of urban and rural communities, but differs from it by taking its particular character from the proximity and

influence of London. Because the sub-region contains so many districts and covers such a large area, there is a concern that size might prevent effective working. The council is currently discussing with the other authorities whether it would be beneficial to split the sub-region into two or more smaller groups.

Stevenage Borough Council is involved in a movement towards sub-regional initiatives. This is resulting in a better understanding of the sub-regional agenda. In 2002, the council took an active role in the production of a sub-regional housing strategy and in the commissioning of a sub-regional housing market study for Hertfordshire. It is also active in a number of sub-regional groups, which engage with strategy, planning policy, homelessness, maintenance issues, and the enabling of new affordable homes. The Hertfordshire Housing Officer's Group, an umbrella group that represents service heads and directors, is chaired by the Stevenage Director of Community Services, who is also a member of the Regional Housing Forum.

The draft sub-regional strategy for 2005-2008 identifies 5 sub-regional priorities:

- Maximising the delivery of affordable housing.
- Developing the intermediate market.
- Improve stock condition.
- Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups.
- Achieving social inclusion.

The Council shares these key priorities and 4 are reflected within dedicated chapters in the Housing Strategy.

The sub-regional strategy has now been submitted in draft form to the Regional Housing Board.

A joint project by Stevenage Borough Council and its neighbouring North Herts District Council to provide affordable homes in North-East Stevenage, places the two councils in the forefront of the new sub-regional approach to collaborative working-

LOCAL PRIORITIES

Stevenage Community Strategy

Since the establishment of a Local Strategic Partnership in January 2003, the council has been working with a range of agencies and organisations to develop the town's first Community Strategy (2003-2015). The partners include representatives from over 40 bodies in the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. The interaction between the LSP and the council demonstrates they are clearly linked. The Director of Community Services made a presentation to the LSP Board to talk about Options Appraisal and LSP members were invited to attend the visioning events run by the Housing Strategy Group. During the consultation period for the community strategy; officers from the housing team contributed comments and feedback in terms of housing priorities.

The Community Strategy aims to create:

- a vibrant town centre;
- thriving neighbourhoods.

To do this, the council aims to create:

- a prosperous town;
- a learning town that invests in young people;
- a healthy and caring town;

- a safe town;
- a creative town;
- a town with strong communities and with opportunities for all;
- a town that's good to live in, with affordable housing, sustainable environment and excellent transport.

The council's Housing Strategy has a part to play in achieving many of these aims and can make contributions in areas such as increasing prosperity (e.g. by ensuring sufficient affordable housing for key workers), health (e.g. by improving the quality of housing) and safety (by tackling anti-social behaviour on estates). Of all these Community Strategy goals, 'a town that's good to live in' has the greatest impact on the Housing Strategy.

The focus here must be to:

- provide more homes and meet a variety of housing needs by:
 - developing a range of affordable housing options;
 - tackling homelessness;
- provide social housing that meets the government's *Decent Homes* standard by:
 - improving the condition of the housing stock.

From this, it can be seen that the Housing Strategy both influences and is influenced by the Community Strategy.

Corporate Business Strategy – *Changing Gear*

The Community Strategy provides the overarching vision for Stevenage in the medium- to long-term. The council's Business Strategy complements the Community Strategy, but focuses on the priorities and ambitions of the council as an organisation in its own right.

In 2003, the council reviewed its 10 *Aims and Ambitions* and condensed them into four. It also established the Priorities, which flowed from them. The four Aims and Ambitions and their related Priorities are set out in the table below.

Aims and Ambitions	Priorities
Community leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging local communities • developing partnership working • enhancing the image of Stevenage
The regeneration of Stevenage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • affordable housing • town expansion • a vibrant town centre • revitalised local communities, community facilities and shops • improved community safety
A first class customer service and good quality services from the council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the cleanliness and condition of the local environment • sustainable management of waste • the provision of top quality housing services to tenants and people in need of housing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one-stop-experience customer service
A fair and inclusive community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equalities

The council will deliver affordable housing and first class customer services through the policies mentioned in the Housing Strategy. It will also contribute to expanding the town, creating a vibrant town centre, revitalising communities, developing equalities and improving community safety.

Other Strategic Links Locally

Many of the strategies and initiatives that the council has developed are linked with the Housing Strategy. Where links exist they are highlighted in the body of this document. Links can be found with:

- *Supporting People*;
- the Private Sector Renewal Policy;
- the Health Improvement Programme;
- the Community Safety Strategy;
- the Capital Asset Management Strategy;
- the District Plan;
- the Equalities Review.

Cross-Authority Working Groups

The council strongly promotes the idea of sections working together within the authority to aid delivery of its cross-cutting agenda. As housing issues and the goals of the Housing Strategy play a central role in many council agendas, the housing section takes an active role in a number of council-wide working groups. Some examples are given below.

- The Affordable Housing Group, which brings together Housing, Planning and Capital Management to monitor sites coming forward for development. The remit of this group is to ensure that appropriate levels of affordable housing are provided and a reasonable flow of sites is secured.
- The Empty Property Strategy Group brings together Environmental Health, Legal and Housing sections to reduce levels of empty property in the town. The group has contributed to the successful achievement of this aim. The council has effectively matched owners with a partner organisation, which manages its Private Sector Leasing (PSL) programme.
- The Equalities Review Working Party is a council-wide group, which seeks to improve the council's performance against the government's Equalities Standard. Housing remains a key participant in this group.

THE PRIORITIES OF THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Consulting the Wider Community

The views of service users and customers play an important role in the council's decision-making process, and are essential to its work. Community leadership, meaningful partnership working and an active engagement with the wider community are core elements of the council's Corporate Strategy. Running parallel to the council's

Corporate Strategy is its Community Strategy, which has been developed with a Local Strategic Partnership (the *Stevenage Partnership*).

Housing priorities emerging from this exercise are set out above.

Tenants and Leaseholders

The council consults with its tenants and leaseholders as an integral part of its working. It is developing and strengthening tenant participation through the Tenant Compact. This is a formal agreement between the council and its tenants.

There are currently seven tenant representative groups in Stevenage, which cover most areas of the town, a leaseholders group, which represents the 1,000 or so council leaseholders and a forum which looks at repairs.

In 2001, the council introduced a housing newsletter, *Housing for You*, which is published three times a year. A newsletter for housing applicants, *Rehousing News*, is published twice a year.

FOSTA, The Federation of Stevenage Tenants Associations, is an umbrella group, which represents the seven tenant organisations in the town. FOSTA has an ongoing influence on the development of council policy. It is represented on both the Council Housing, and Wellbeing and Scrutiny Panels, and plays a key role on the Housing Strategy Group that is undertaking the Options Appraisal.

Involving Members

Members were invited to the 'Have a Say Day' detailed below, which made significant contributions to the priorities laid out in the strategy. The progress of the Action Plan and strategy implementation will be reviewed by DMT and Members on a regular basis. Certain projects may be subject to Executive Committee approvals as well. The Executive Councillor: Housing and four other Members are part of the Housing Strategy Group for Options Appraisal. Recently a Members briefing was held in the evening to present the headline findings from the latest Housing Needs Survey, this was a joint event held by planning and housing.

Partnership Working

The council works with a number of partner organisations. These organisations range from large statutory bodies such as Hertfordshire County Council to small specialist voluntary bodies. Partnership arrangements ensure that consultation takes place continually to the benefit of all parties. A full list of council partnerships can be found in Appendix Four.

'Have a Say Day'

The council hosts an annual housing conference called 'Have a Say Day' to which it invites tenants and leaseholders as well as key partners from the statutory and voluntary sectors. Have a Say Day is a listening forum in which diverse groups of stakeholders are invited to contribute to the debate on local housing issues. This annual event now makes a regular and important contribution to the development of the Housing Strategy.

In a survey conducted in 2002 stakeholders identified anti-social behaviour as their largest single concern. Homelessness was ranked second and issues related to special needs, third.

In the 2004 survey for the same purpose, stakeholders indicated that their greatest concern was providing new affordable housing. The housing needs of younger people also featured strongly. Anti-social behaviour, homelessness, the environment (more use of brown field sites), and the need to provide better housing standards for disabled people were also highlighted in the response.

These findings have been prioritised in the council's Action Plan, which is set out in Section Three of this strategy. In contrast, maintenance of the stock of existing homes, which is the council's highest priority as measured by the level of resourcing, was not raised as a concern by stakeholders.

THE OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Decent Homes

The government requires the council to undertake an Options Appraisal to make sure that the homes it manages will meet the *Decent Homes* standard by 2010. To meet the *Decent Homes* standard properties must be in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities and provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

The purpose of the appraisal is to improve the housing stock and the quality of services to tenants, and to consider the broader housing context. There will be a particular focus on:

- achieving *Decent Homes* targets;
- the aspirations of tenants and leaseholders;
- the legal obligations of the council (e.g. to the homeless and those related to health and safety issues);
- the wider housing market and the need for affordable homes;
- the need for neighbourhood renewal and regeneration.

To ensure that the Options Appraisal is effective, the council has:

- set out a clear timetable with the Government Office for the East of England to ensure completion by June 2005;
- set aside a budget of £100,000 to complete the process;
- completed a Stock Condition Survey and Housing Needs Survey to inform its decisions on *Decent Homes* and the future need for affordable housing;
- appointed a lead consultant to oversee the project, an independent Tenant Advisor and a communications consultant;
- set up a joint Councillor/Tenant Strategy Group, which also includes staff and leaseholder representatives to oversee the project;
- undertake a stock condition survey of non-traditional properties (for example, flats and system-built).

The options being considered are:

- **Stock Retention:** the council continues to manage its stock directly;
- bringing in the private sector to manage the stock through the government's **Private Finance Initiative;**
- setting up an **Arms Length Management Company (ALMO)**, which is separate from the council - under this arrangement a board made up of tenants, councillors and volunteers will oversee the direction and performance of the company;

- transferring the stock to a **Registered Social Landlord** (Housing Association) who will then manage it - this proposal will only go forward following a ballot of tenants;
- a mix of these options.

As the council currently holds a diminishing stock of 8,700 homes, any change to stock management arrangements will have a significant impact on the Housing Strategy and could affect a large number of staff. There could also be significant financial implications to a change, as all of the above options, bar stock retention, could open up new investment opportunities, and provide additional money for stock investment and/or new affordable homes.

It is a requirement of the Options Appraisal that the council retain an open mind on all its options until the end of the process. As the appraisal is still in progress, the Housing Strategy will identify the impact various options will have on its priorities. At this stage no single strategic direction can be identified and the contents of this document should be considered in this light.

The Council's Priorities for Housing

The council considered many factors before establishing its priorities for housing. These are:

- the government's wider housing agenda, including *Decent Homes*;
- the emerging regional and sub-regional perspective;
- the aims of the wider Stevenage community and the Local Strategic Partnership as expressed in the Community Strategy;
- the council's own corporate aims as set out in the Corporate Business Strategy *Changing Gear*;
- the views of tenants, stakeholders, leaseholders and partners as identified through regular consultation.

Recent Housing Strategies have taken 'Good Housing for All' as the council's Vision. Though this Vision retains its full relevance today, a newly emerging housing agenda (particularly with regard to the Options Appraisal), suggests that some simplification and rationalisation of priorities would be useful. For the next four years the council will focus on:

- **providing affordable homes:** the council will aim to enable the provision of affordable housing that meets the needs of the local community;
- **tackling homelessness:** the council will aim to:
 - prevent homelessness wherever possible, and provide a free and comprehensive Housing Advice Service;
 - provide a high quality Homelessness Service with an emphasis on giving support to people in temporary accommodation;
- **addressing the issue of special needs:** the council will aim to:
 - be a full partner of *Care in the Community* and *Supporting People* in Stevenage;
- **providing choice and quality:** the council will aim to:
 - improve the quality of housing for people in housing need and extend the choices open to them;
- **providing Decent Homes:** the council will aim to:
 - ensure that all homes in the town are of a decent standard;
 - achieve the *Decent Homes* standard by 2010 for all social rented housing;
- **providing sustainable communities:** the council will aim to:
 - tackle crime and social exclusion, ensure equality of opportunity and encourage regeneration through quality housing services.

The next section (Section Three) discusses the council's Action Plan, which sets out the way in which it intends to achieve these goals. The key elements of the Action Plan are summarised in separate document. Each of the following sections contains:

- an analysis of the current position;
- reports on progress to date in achieving our goals;
- the council's future priorities and proposals;
- an outline of the possible impact the Options Appraisal will have on each priority;
- highlights, where appropriate, of the options the council has specifically discounted, and the reasons why.

SECTION THREE: THE HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

PRIORITY ONE: PROVIDING AFFORDABLE HOMES

Strategic Aim:

- to enable the provision of affordable housing that meets the needs of the local community.

THE CURRENT POSITION AND CONTEXT

The Local Housing Market

In 2003, the council commissioned David Couttie and partners to undertake a new Housing Needs Survey. The results were published in the

The Housing Needs Survey indicates that the demand for affordable housing far outstrips supply. It suggests that in the period to 2011 there will be an annual shortfall of 435 affordable units each year. This is a fivefold increase since the last Housing Needs Survey

In 2003, the average cost of a dwelling in Stevenage was £149,070. This compares with a county average of £233,563

	Detached	Semi-Detached	Terraced	Flat	Average
St Albans	£488,843	£288,058	£239,487	£162,493	£289,206
North Herts	£346,085	£210,891	£169,264	£117,821	£211,918
Countywide	£421,511	£241,953	£187,521	£143,079	£233,563
Stevenage	£250,440	£161,386	£139,323	£89,875	£149,070

Source: Land Registry

The table below shows the minimum income that will probably be needed to purchase one- and two-bedroom dwellings (those that are more likely to be accessible to first-time buyers) in Stevenage.

Property Type	Minimum Income
1-bedroom flat	£24,500
2-bedroom flat	£29,800
2-bedroom house	£38,475

For the private rented market the research indicates:

Property Type	Minimum Income (based on 25% rent: income)	Typical Market Rent	Rent Officer Reference Rent (The ceiling for Housing Benefit)
One-bedroom flat	£19,200	£509	£487
Two-bedroom flat	£26,400	£607	£575
Two- or three- bedroom terraced house	£27,840	£670	£612

Average incomes in Stevenage during 2003 were £29,188 (male) and £19,000 (female). The Housing Needs Survey indicated that households in housing need were likely to have an income significantly below this, and that their ability to gain access to the housing market was correspondingly limited:

- 66% of households could afford a rent of no more than £60 per week;
- 82% could not afford a mortgage of more than £400 per month;
- home ownership is beyond the means of 90% of 'concealed' (i.e. newly formed/forming) households identified by the survey; in addition, the evidence suggests a similar proportion of existing households registered with the council have also been priced out of the private sector.

There is clear evidence that the increase in the need for affordable homes is linked to an increase in the cost of buying a home locally: incomes have not kept pace with prices.

In August 2000, there were 715 Jobseeker Allowance claimants in Stevenage of which 37% had child dependents (Census 2001).

In August 2000, there were 4,430 Income Support claimants in Stevenage, of which 3% were aged under 20 (Census 2001).

Assisted Home Ownership

The Housing Need Survey of 1998 advised that,

Any targets for low-cost market or low-cost discounted housing should be very modest, as there is no evidence of any significant need in either of these categories.

Given the relatively low property prices at that time, schemes such as shared ownership did not offer a significant saving on outright purchase. This situation was reflected in the council's affordable development strategy of the time, which focused exclusively on affordable homes for rent.

The 2004 survey suggests a wholly changed picture: subsidised home ownership at 70% of market cost would meet the needs of around 100 newly forming households every year. 80 to 90 existing households would also benefit.

Key Workers

The survey defined 'key workers' as those who work in the public sector. That includes people employed by local authorities in education and other services, and by the Health, Police and Fire services. The survey's findings included the following:

- using the income thresholds noted above, those key workers who could not afford to become owner-occupiers in Stevenage formed:
 - 65% of local authority staff;
 - 59% of health staff;
 - 54% of police;
 - 48% of fire staff;
 - 40% of education staff;
- the most popular forms of tenure among these groups were council rented accommodation (53%) and owner-occupation (31%);
- there is some evidence of key workers leaving the borough to set up home elsewhere; of these, around one-third cited affordability as the main reason for their move.

Affordable Homes for Rent

90% of new-forming households cannot afford to buy locally, and 81% have an income below £20,000. The survey suggests that these groups could not afford to become owner-occupiers and require rented housing. Existing households in housing need, such as the 2,220 on the council's housing registers, and a further 262 homeless households in temporary accommodation cannot afford to buy a home locally either.

Lone parent households with dependent children were 7.5% of the Stevenage population compared to an England & Wales average of 6.5% (Census 2001).

In the new Index of Deprivation Stevenage is ranked as the most deprived district in Hertfordshire (IMD 2004).

Stevenage has a high proportion of children under 16 living in low income households. The latest available figures show 30.27% in Stevenage, 20.97% in North Herts and 12.65 % in East Herts (IMD 2000)

As the survey indicates, around 3,000 existing households and 3,300 new households will be moving or forming in the next five years. This suggests a very strong and continuing demand for affordable homes to rent. It is extremely unlikely that the council will be able to meet this demand. As the summary below indicates, the net shortfall in any one year could exceed the entire supply for that year.

Summary of Need

Total Annual Need	996		
Existing stock: projected re-lets (529) / New Supply (32)	561		
Net new units needed	435		
Of which: Shared Ownership/Equity		163	35%
Of which: Rental		304	65%

Type of Accommodation Required

The following table identifies the dwelling sizes required, and compares the current findings with those of the previous Housing Needs Survey.

Property Size	2003 Survey Findings	1997 Survey Findings
One-bedroom	20%	20%
Two-bedroom	28%	25%
Three-bedroom	36%	45%
Four+ bedroom	16%	10%

This suggests that, among those in housing need, there is a small shift in the balance of household size, but not a significant one.

Characteristics of Households in Housing Need

The Housing Needs Survey also examined the composition of households in housing need and indicated a breakdown as follows:

Family Composition	Percentage of whole
Families	38% (of which 8.6% are single parents)
Couples	32%
Single People	14%
Older People	16%

Sub-Regional Housing Need and the Housing Market

The trend towards increasing levels of housing need in Stevenage appear to be evident across the whole East of England Region and across the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region in particular.

The proximity of London puts pressure on the sub-region: all districts within it have a great need for affordable housing; a need that is growing as property prices rise. A study funded by Stevenage Borough Council and other sub-regional authorities, and carried out in 2003 by Cambridge University, explored the sub-regional housing market. Its conclusions provide a useful baseline on which to build district housing strategies, sub-regional and regional strategies and future investment strategies in affordable housing. Findings from the study include:

- 9,744 affordable homes per year are required across the sub-region but in the period to 2011 a total of 9,078 units are likely to be built;
- there are over 26,000 households on waiting lists;
- house price to income ratios are the highest in the South-East;
- there is evidence of polarisation: people living in social rented homes are increasingly likely to be economically inactive; this includes the elderly and vulnerable.

STRATEGIC FUNDING OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Approved Development Programme and Local Authority Social Housing Grant

There have been significant changes to the way new affordable housing is funded, and these have had an impact on the funding of affordable housing locally.

In 2001 the council went “debt free”, which meant (amongst many other things) that it could gain access to enhanced levels of Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) to develop affordable housing locally in conjunction with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). At the same time, the Housing Corporation continued to fund individual projects bid for by RSLs.

Local Authority capital funding in the form of LASHG was abolished in April 2003, and all social housing grants were centralised at regional level. With the formation of a Regional Housing Board and Regional Housing Forum, bids for funding schemes are now evaluated by the Housing Corporation against key priorities set out in the Regional Housing Strategy (see above) and published in 2003.

The council's strategy will be to maximise the potential grant achievable within this framework while meeting its own priorities.

Growth Area Delivery Grant

The government has set aside £164m for the implementation of the Sustainable Communities Plan. This includes money for investment in new housing located in the growth areas. Stevenage is in a growth area, and the council was awarded £5m in 2003/04 for three schemes.

Housing Partnership: Challenge Fund

The Challenge Fund formerly part of the Approved Development Programme (ADP), has been established to fund affordable homes on land owned by English Partnerships (the national regeneration agency) in partnership with two Registered Social Landlords: Genesis and Bedfordshire Pilgrims. Two sites in Stevenage have been identified for potential development. Together these will yield as many as 200 new affordable homes.

Local Authority Land Disposals

The council has adopted a policy that where it sells land it owns, 40% of that land must be set aside for affordable housing. This disposal of land at less than market value represents a sizeable subsidy to the overall development cost of a site, so the council is making a direct contribution to the provision of affordable homes. In 2003/04 this amounted to a subsidy of around £1.75m on Brittain Way.

Affordable Housing Through Planning Gain (S.106 Sites)

The Stevenage District Plan requires that on development sites that are a hectare or more in area or are intended for 25 or more new dwellings, 25% of all units must be set aside for affordable housing. Of these affordable housing units, 80% should be social rented and a further 8-20% should be other forms of affordable tenure. This requirement creates the largest single source of development land for affordable housing, and so remains a key element of the Housing Strategy. As no two sites are the same, and schemes are negotiated on a site-by-site basis, it is not possible to quantify the level of subsidy this represents in cash terms.

NEW AFFORDABLE HOMES: PROGRESS AND DELIVERY

Monitoring Progress

The council monitors affordable housing delivery through an Affordable Housing Group comprising officers from Housing, Planning and Asset Management (the latter being responsible for the management and disposal of council owned land). This more joined-

up approach to delivering affordable housing, has led to an increase in the number of affordable units being build on council-owned sites.

The Affordable Housing Group also monitors the rate at which sites comes forward. This allows the council to undertake longer-term planning, and take advantage of opportunities afforded by specific initiatives. For example, bids for Growth Area Delivery Grant were only possible because of the knowledge and understanding generated by this work.

Regional/Sub-Regional Initiatives

Recently, Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) and North Herts District Council (NHDC) submitted a joint bid to the Housing Corporation to build affordable homes at north-east Stevenage. The two councils are also working together to agree the affordable housing element on the Stevenage West site in advance of the final decision by ODPM.

Delivery of Affordable Housing

There has been no substantial development of affordable housing during the year 2002-2003: planning completion returns show only four units of new housing were delivered and no affordable units were delivered during 2003/04. Funding issues and on-site complications have played their part in this, but the main problem was a lack of suitable sites.

For the period 2004/05 a number of new sites and funding opportunities have emerged. A summary of progress made to date can be found at Appendix 5:

Stevenage West

Stevenage West is the name of a proposal to develop homes on a site west of the A1(M) at Stevenage: about 5,000 dwellings are proposed in the first phase. The proposed development extends over land in both the Borough of Stevenage and in North Herts. It involves a number of complex and inter-connected partnerships, which span the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The proposals are broadly welcomed by Stevenage Borough Council, but are opposed, in principle by Hertfordshire County Council and North Herts District Council. They are being considered at a public enquiry and will, in due course, be considered by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

The council has worked with the Development Consortium, North Herts District Council and Hertfordshire County Council to agree the level of affordable housing in advance of a final decision on the planning application. It has been agreed that the affordable housing element will be 27.5% of the total development, and will include provision for special needs. This means that in its first phase the scheme could yield over 1,000 affordable homes. In the longer term, the proposal could increase the size of the community by as much as 25%.

The proposals for Stevenage West will have an impact on affordable housing projections. In the council's 2003 Housing Strategy, the potential for growth represented by the scheme was identified as central to its strategy on affordability. This view has not been modified by subsequent events. As in 2003, the council

must effectively consider two strategies for the provision of affordable housing: one with Stevenage West, and one without.

Town-Centre Regeneration

The council is working with English Partnerships to regenerate Stevenage town centre. While the scheme is driven by commercial considerations and the need for economic regeneration, the delivery of housing is an important objective for both parties. The council is liaising with the new Housing Partnership (a joint venture by English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation) to develop requirements for the scheme. The development brief issued jointly by the council and English Partnerships stated:

New sustainable communities will be created and integrated with existing communities to provide a high-quality, higher-density living environment. The new residential developments will feel urban, and contain a mix of tenure that will be varied, creating balanced communities.

The council has selected a preferred development partner. The plans include provision for around 1,250, one- and two-bedroom flats. The council will balance the need to provide affordable housing with the wider regenerative aims of the scheme.

PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Options Appraisal and Providing Affordable Homes

Making sure that its housing stock meets the *Decent Homes* standard by the government's target date of 2010 is a high priority for the council and it has committed a very significant proportion of its resources available for capital investment to this purpose. This commitment will have an impact on the resources available for developing additional social-rented housing.

Changes to the present stock-holding arrangement for council homes, which could follow from the Options Appraisal could also draw down additional resources for stock maintenance by releasing additional capital resources. This is because the borrowing rules under such arrangements as ALMO and LSVT are much less flexible for councils who retain their stock. The current stream of capital accrued from Right to Buy sales could then be re-invested in programmes other than stock maintenance

Change to stock arrangements could increase the resources available to invest in other housing priorities, including the development of new homes. The Options Appraisal will consider the future funding options for the development of affordable homes in conjunction with tenants and other stakeholders.

Current Proposals

The following actions being undertaken by the by the council over the next year could have a significant impact on the delivery of affordable housing. The Action Plan identifies these in more detail.

Current actions include:

- completing the Options Appraisal;
- setting aside £250,000 for investment in affordable housing;
- considering delivery of the sub-regional agenda;

- pursuing redevelopment of the town centre;
- adopting the District Plan;
- reviewing garage/small land sites for possible development;
- planning regeneration of the neighbourhood centres;
- exploring with developers the option of delivering Section 106 agreements without grant;
- working with Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations) to deliver affordable housing without grant;
- encouraging Registered Social Landlords to adopt modern methods of construction, wherever appropriate;
- pursuing cash-incentive and under-occupation schemes;
- adopting an Affordable Housing Strategy;
- ensuring key worker housing needs are met;
- considering how best to meet the need for assisted home ownership as set out in the Housing Needs Survey.

The development of additional affordable housing is driven by the increasing demand evidenced by the Housing Needs Survey and applications to the waiting and transfer lists. RSLs are selected for Council owned sites following a process of evaluation that considers experience, local management arrangements, ability to deliver and access to external funding.

The council is not:

- investing *significant* capital receipts from *Right to Buy* sales in affordable housing. These monies are being targeted at the government's *Decent Home* programme pending the outcome of the Options Appraisal.

ACTION PLAN

To:

- maximise the delivery of affordable homes (target: 100 per annum);
- extend the range of homes available to those in housing need
- increase the rate of delivery of affordable homes

PRIORITY TWO: TACKLING HOMELESSNESS

Strategic Aims:

- to prevent homelessness wherever possible;
- to provide a free and comprehensive Housing Advice Service;
- to provide a high-quality Homelessness Service that places emphasis on support to people in temporary accommodation.

THE CURRENT POSITION AND CONTEXT

Homelessness Review: Key Findings

The council published its Homelessness Strategy in July 2003. The strategy draws upon a comprehensive review of local homelessness conducted in 2002/03. The Homeless Strategy is available at www.stevenage.gov.uk.

Homelessness is the highest level of housing need and can have a powerful impact on the individuals who experience it and on the communities where it prevails. The number of households accepted by the council under the homelessness legislation has increased by 60% in the last five years. During the same period, the number of households in temporary accommodation rose from about 100 to over 200, an increase of approximately 100%.

These figures imply that the increase in the number of households living in temporary accommodation is not to be explained solely by an increase in demand. A decline in the overall supply of affordable permanent homes also appears to be a factor.

Causes of Homelessness

While the causes of homelessness are many and complex, national research has identified a number of key risk factors that are present in the majority of homelessness cases: these factors are financial, health-related, social and behavioural. Council records (performance indicators returned to the ODPM) form the basis of statistical analyses on the causes of homelessness. These are useful but should be treated with caution. It is often the immediate, rather than the underlying, cause or causes of homelessness that are recorded. For example, a person who builds up mortgage arrears because of mental illness, and loses their home as a consequence, is likely to be recorded as homeless through arrears rather than the mental health issue that is the true cause.

Homelessness cause	2002/03	2001/02	2000/01
Parental eviction	69	51	17
Eviction from other relatives/friends	13	29	59
Relationship breakdown	13	12	3
Violence/harassment	9	21	13
Mortgage arrears	3	2	10
Loss of private tenancy	30	39	39
Rent arrears	5	2	1
Leaving institutions	2	5	1
Other	4	10	3
Total	148	171	146

The most commonly identified cause of homelessness is family breakdown: parental evictions and broken relationships. The underlying cause, anecdotally evidenced from consultation with the council's stakeholders and users, is a lack of affordable alternatives. This implies that the key risk factor is financial (poverty and low income). There is also evidence that social factors (early parenthood) are important.

Who is Becoming Homeless?

The following table shows the composition of those homeless households towards whom the council has exercised a statutory duty to provide housing. (These households are described as being 'in priority need.')

Household Composition	2002/03	2001/02	2000/01
One dependent child	67	72	62
Two dependent children	19	21	17
Three dependent children	15	15	7
Dependent children: all	101	108	86
Pregnancy	34	33	33
Vulnerable: OAP	2	7	5
Vulnerable: disabled	3	9	3
Vulnerable: mental health	4	10	6
Vulnerable: young people	3	2	4
Other	1	2	9
Total	148	171	146

Two facts stand out from the figures in the tables above.

First, families with or expecting children are the largest group of households in priority need within Stevenage. Of these, families with one child and households with a pregnancy make up the majority of cases each year. This pattern is repeated when the figures are analysed over a five-year period. By contrast, single vulnerable people make up a relative small number of cases each year.

Second, parental evictions are the single largest cause of homelessness (their numbers are only moderately smaller than all other causes combined).

These two facts taken together indicate that young parenthood, leading to family breakdown, is the key underlying cause of homelessness in Stevenage. In national studies, Stevenage appears in the highest quartile for teenage pregnancy (while the rest of Hertfordshire is in the lowest).

The council's Homelessness Strategy makes the need to tackle issues relating to this group its highest priority.

Homelessness in the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities

Ethnic Group	Census: Stevenage	Census: England and Wales	Homelessness Applications: Ethnic Origin	Housing Advice Clients: Ethnic Origin
	%	%	%	%
White	94.6	90.9	90	94
African/ Caribbean	1.2	2.3	1	2
Asian	2.1	4.6	2.5	2
Other	0.7	0.9	3.5	2
Not Given	N/A	N/A	3	N/A

The figures for homelessness within these groups appear to be broadly in line with the overall population, although the 3% "not given" could be significant when viewed against the town's relatively small Black and Minority Ethnic population.

Single Homelessness

Apart from homeless households covered by statute, there are others who are not considered to be in 'priority need'. These are mainly single people without children.

As there has been little evidence of rough sleeping in Stevenage (this is a view shared by stakeholders, such as Stevenage Haven) the council decided not to conduct a rough-sleeper head count this year, though it will monitor the situation.

Ten percent of all enquiries (as many as 200 per year) made to the Housing Advice Team are from single homeless people. If the understanding of homelessness is

broadened and the number of enquires about housing options is considered, the figure rises to one-third. Affordability appears to be a key factor for this group too. Though information is probably not as reliable for this group as for 'priority-need' households, support for this view comes from a consideration of Rent Officer 'Reference Levels' for Stevenage. These levels set a ceiling for Housing Benefit payments.

Average Housing Benefit Reference Rent (Maximum amount normally payable)		Average Market Rent	
	£/Month		£/month
One bedroom flat	437.50	One bedroom flat	450.00
Studio apartment	325.00	Studio apartment	375.00

Homelessness Review: the Stakeholder Perspective

As part of the Homelessness Review, the council consulted widely with partners, tenants and service users. The issues that emerged were:

- the high incidence of homelessness among young people and the lack of services to meet their needs;
- the lack of affordable general needs housing;
- disproportionate levels of homelessness amongst certain vulnerable groups (other than young people, who were identified as the very highest risk):
 - people with mental health problems;
 - ex-offenders;
 - people with drug and alcohol abuse problems;
 - pregnant teenagers;
 - people with learning disabilities;
 - step children.

Actions to tackle these issues were given appropriate priority in the Homelessness Strategy.

HOMELESSNESS: THE STRATEGIC AGENDA

The Homelessness Strategy

The council's Homelessness Strategy has four key objectives:

- better prevention;
- an effective safety net;
- minimizing homelessness;
- a joined-up approach.

Better Prevention

The council's principal strategic aim is to prevent homelessness. To achieve this, it has established separate Housing Advice and Homelessness assessment teams, but manages them within the same service unit (Housing Needs and Strategy). This arrangement provides the most effective use of resources for preventing homelessness.

The council's approach to preventing homelessness has three elements:

- **providing accessible services** so that people know where to go when they need to;
- **providing an effective housing advice service** so that everyone threatened with homelessness can be given the best advice;
- **supporting vulnerable tenants** in their homes to minimize repeated homelessness.

An Effective Safety Net

As it will not be possible to prevent homelessness in every case, appropriate quality services are required to meet the needs of homeless households. The council aims to:

- ensure a sufficient supply of **affordable homes**;
- provide suitable temporary accommodation that is of a **high quality**, so that the impact of homelessness on people can be minimised;
- assess applications **efficiently** to ensure that resources are used appropriately and applicants receive quality services.

Minimising Homelessness

A strategic, joined-up approach to minimising homelessness has three main elements:

- **managing performance and resources**; for example, by providing sufficient temporary accommodation to avoid the use of bed and breakfast;
- **working in partnership** with others to meet the often complex needs of homeless people. Partners include Health, Social Services, Probation, the voluntary and charitable sectors and housing associations;
- **assessing needs, gaps and priorities** to ensure that current needs are met, and future eventualities planned for.

A Joined-up Strategy

The council's Homelessness Strategy acknowledges the contribution of broader strategic goals, such as those of improving health or reducing crime and social exclusion. The Homelessness Strategy, like the Housing Strategy, both informs and is influenced by a wider cross-cutting agenda, which includes issues such as social exclusion and the environment.

TACKLING HOMELESSNESS: PROGRESS AND DELIVERY

Better Prevention

Progress has been made on the central aim of preventing homelessness:

- the council's Housing Advice Service is now accredited with a *Quality Mark* in the 'general help' category; in 2001/02, 380 interviews took place and the service provided help to 754 people; it conducted 15 surgeries and made 12 home visits;
- client appointments with Housing Advice took place within an 10 day target;
- some £12,600 in back-dated benefits were paid to clients as a direct result of Housing Advice intervention;
- a total of 41 evictions were averted following intervention from Housing Advice;
- the council introduced a family mediation scheme in partnership with RELATE to prevent homelessness in the event of family breakdown.

Improving The Safety Net: More Affordable Homes

Progress on increasing the supply of permanent homes can be found in the section preceding this one.

Improving The Safety Net: Temporary Accommodation

The council's aim is to provide high-quality temporary accommodation with support to homeless people. There were, as at 2003/04 over 200 households in council temporary accommodation, and 95% of this accommodation is self-contained. Currently, only one longer-term hostel remains in management and this is awaiting the outcome of a refurbishment bid (made to the Housing Corporation) to convert it for use by homeless young people.

The council provides 24-hour, on-site support for up to 30 young parents (including under-18s) at Wellfield Court, and at its Reception Centre at 12 North Road. A floating support service is provided to vulnerable households living in other temporary accommodation.

The council has also committed £30,000 to introduce a Private Sector Leasing Scheme which will create a further seven self-contained units. It has also set aside £100,000 for the refurbishment of 12 North Road.

The council continues to meet its obligations under homelessness legislation without the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for the tenth consecutive year.

Improving The Safety Net: Efficient Service

The efficiency and responsiveness of the council's Homelessness and Housing Advice Service was recognised in 2001 with the award of a Charter Mark. Ongoing customer surveys show continuing high levels of customer satisfaction with the service. Eighty-nine percent of clients were satisfied with the overall level of service. On average, 80% of cases are determined within 33 days.

In 2003, the council submitted a bid to the Beacon Scheme on the theme of 'Tackling Homelessness'. Though unsuccessful, the service made the final shortlist of 10, one of only four district councils in the country to do so.

In 2003, the council opened a borough-wide customer service centre. This provides a one-stop-shop service with improved interview and reception facilities and information points.

Minimizing Homelessness: Partnership Working

Details of partnership working and how it has been effective in providing for people with special needs can be found in the next section. A protocol on the assessment of need under the Children Act for homeless 16 and 17 year olds has been agreed with Hertfordshire County Council Social Services, and will be rolled out in 2004.

PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Options Appraisal and Tackling Homelessness

The council's ability to tackle homelessness is linked to the availability of affordable homes. The impact of the Options Appraisal on this issue is considered in the previous section, **Providing Affordable Homes**. Changes to the way the council's housing stock is owned, managed and maintained could, in the long term, affect the way in which the existing stock of temporary homeless accommodation is allocated. The Options Appraisal will consider the impact of changes on homelessness and the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy.

Current Proposals

Progress on homelessness issues is evaluated through a Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. Twice a year the council holds a Homelessness Strategy Forum, to which key stakeholders are invited. The forum assesses the continuing relevance of council priorities and evaluates progress in meeting them. The first forum highlighted two areas of concern. These will now be given appropriate priority. They are:

- a gap in the Action Plan, which fails to address the needs of people who are vulnerable and, though not homeless, are at risk of losing their home. The council will consider a Tenancy Maintenance Strategy. Currently it is considering a joint bid for *Supporting People* money with North Herts District Council and Hertfordshire Young Homeless Group to provide additional support to younger people in tenancies;
- the need to increase supply of affordable housing.

Other actions being considered are:

- a rough sleeper head count, which reflects increased concern about levels of single homelessness;
- increasing the availability of supported housing to those who need it;
- revising the allocations policy to give more choice to homeless households selecting a permanent home;
- further expansion of the Private Sector Leasing scheme (see Glossary) to increase the supply of temporary accommodation.

The number of households accepted as homeless has increased by 60% in the last 5 years and the number of households in temporary accommodation has increased by approximately 100%. Partners such as Health, Social Services, Probation, the voluntary and charitable sectors and RSLs aid a joined-up strategic approach.

Actions the council has considered, but decided not to pursue are:

- a complete refurbishment of its Reception Centre (which provides initial accommodation to new homeless applicants): this was rejected on the grounds that it would do nothing to reduce the level of shared facilities and make only a marginal improvement to services;
- the outsourcing of Housing Advice: it was concluded that this would not improve the service.

ACTION PLAN

To:

- reduce levels of homelessness by better prevention and improved access;
- provide an effective and efficient homelessness service.

PRIORITY THREE: SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Strategic Aim:

- to be a fully integrated partner in, and provider of, *Care in the Community* and *Supporting People* in Stevenage.

THE CURRENT POSITION AND CONTEXT

Special Needs in Stevenage

For many years the council has given a high priority to making suitable accommodation available for people in special need. Recently, it has worked closely with Hertfordshire County Council and the nine other Hertfordshire district councils to implement *Supporting People* on a countywide basis and at a strategic level.

The 2003 Housing Needs Survey looked at the prevalence of special needs within the borough. It found that 21.5% of all households contain a person with special needs. This compares with the 1997 survey where the figure was 16%.

The following table analyses these figures in more detail:

	Number of households with one or member with special needs	Percentage of households with special needs
Walking difficulty	2976	26.8
Limiting long-term illness	1830	16.4
Other physical difficulty	1625	14.6
Respiratory/circulatory problems	1502	13.5
Impaired sight/hearing	1173	10.5
Wheelchair user	885	8
Mental health problem	701	6.3
Learning disability	437	3.9
Total	11129*	100

*The actual number of households with a special need is estimated at 7827, as some have multiple needs.

About 60% of households containing a person with special needs are council or Registered Social Landlord (Housing Association) tenants.

Special Needs: Countywide

The county Supporting People Team has carried out a mapping exercise of existing special needs provision across Hertfordshire. The main service-user group consists of older persons with support needs (23,790 households, equivalent to 64% of the total). Other significant groupings are:

- homeless families with support needs: 792 (2.1%);
- people with learning disability: 1,422 (3.8%);
- people with mental health problems: 1,184 (3.2%);
- single homeless people with support needs: 1,111 (3%);
- young people at risk: 279 (0.8%).

Local data is based upon an analysis of need (needs mapping), the county survey, by contrast evaluates existing provision. The council's 2003 Homelessness Review identified a shortage of provision for:

- young people at risk;
- ex-offenders;
- substance misusers;
- people with mental health problems.

The council is currently conducting a review of older persons services. This has shown that although older people with support needs are the biggest single user group, there is a surplus of provision in the town.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: PROGRESS AND DELIVERY

Current Supported Housing Provision

The table in Appendix Six indicates the current level of supported housing available in the Borough. As indicated above, some gaps in the level of provision exist, and there remains a shortfall of accommodation particularly for vulnerable young people.

Supported Housing for Older People

A Best Value Review of services for older people has been undertaken in 2003/04. The Partnership and Community Review Panel has undertaken the Review at Member level supported by an officer project team. The Improvement Plan builds on the performance assessment provided by the Beacon Council Advisory Panel – the Council was short-listed for Beacon Council status. The Improvement Plan covers issues such as corporate leadership, performance management, communication, consultation, community engagement, collaboration with other services and equality and diversity. At the time of writing the council has over 20 sheltered flats, which are void and for which no demand has been identified. The council is keen that housing of this type meets the needs of older people in the 21st century and meets the requirements of the *Supporting People* programme. The review will be completed in 2005.

The Supporting People Programme

Stevenage has supported the development of the Hertfordshire *Supporting People* Strategy. Councillor Ann Webb, Executive Portfolio Holder (Housing) represents the council on the *Supporting People* Commissioning Body and the council continues to play an active role as a member of the *Supporting People* Core Strategy Development Group.

The Commissioning Body consists of representatives from Hertfordshire County Council, the 10 Hertfordshire district councils, Hertfordshire Probation Service, and the Health Service. The *Supporting People* Strategy was endorsed by the Commissioning Body and submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in 2002. Stevenage Borough Council supports the county's strategic vision:

To ensure that high quality supported housing is available to those who need it most, and where it is needed most, in Hertfordshire

To implement the *Supporting People* regime to provide effective, inclusive decision making and efficient administration across the county.

In Stevenage there are 12 providers of supported housing who now receive *Supporting People* funding. Together they manage 455 individual dwellings. The council owns and manages a further 900 sheltered dwellings. The impact of the *Supporting People* programme has been to give the sector greater certainty about funding. It has also provided a quality framework to evaluate the contribution of individual programmes. Stevenage Haven is a good example of the benefits to be derived from *Supporting People*. As a direct result of the programme, this scheme has been able to introduce all-day opening from 2004 (instead of overnight provision only).

Supporting People now lies at the heart of the council's approach to special needs provision.

The council intend to remain firmly engaged in the process with our partners to influence the direction of the programme countywide and to ensure delivery of the countywide Strategy within Stevenage. Until recent structural changes were initiated by the Hertfordshire *Supporting People* authority, the council employed a full-time, dedicated *Supporting People* officer (known as a District Co-ordinator) who, as well as working on *Supporting People* in Stevenage, contributed extensively to the countywide implementation programme.

Multi-Agency Working

The council has been something of a pioneer in the area of multi-agency working. It was instrumental, for example, in setting up a Special Needs Housing Panel with Social Services' Adult Care Services some 5 years ago. The panel recommends vulnerable persons for accelerated re-housing. The tenant has an agreed care and resettlement plan, which is underpinned by Social Services' Care Plan Approach. This combination of structured support and accelerated re-housing has proved extremely successful in minimising homelessness amongst vulnerable people and also in managing repeated homelessness where tenancies fail because of inadequate support.

In 2003, a formal protocol was agreed with Social Services and North Herts District Council, which widens the scope of the existing multi-agency Special Needs Panel and extends joint working to include evaluation of the effectiveness of strategic planning and

the assessment of client needs. As North Herts District Council and Stevenage Borough Council form a single Quadrant (an administrative area of Hertfordshire County Council), this new protocol will enable multi-agency commissioning of and bidding for new services in addition to joint operational work.

The council has also recently agreed a protocol with Hertfordshire County Council's Children Schools and Families for the needs assessment of homeless under eighteens as part of a process of improving services to them. The Homelessness Review has highlighted a significant gap in provision for under eighteens. The council has therefore:

- bid for Approved Development Programme (ADP) money to extend the provision of supported housing;
- used Homelessness Grant monies from the government's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to fund a *Crashpad* scheme with District Council partners across the county (see Glossary for definition of *Crashpad* scheme);
- agreed to make a joint bid with North Herts District Council for *Supporting People* money to provide floating support to young people taking on tenancies for the first time.

Summary of Progress

The council has made progress in supporting people with special needs through:

- a multi-agency approach, a dedicated special needs housing officer and a comprehensive specialist service to minimize homelessness and housing need;
- a revised protocol for mental health and learning disability with Hertfordshire County Council and North Herts. District Council;
- a negotiated, countywide, joint protocol for the assessment of homeless young people;
- the refurbishment of a new hostel for Stevenage Haven in a town-centre location;
- work with Stevenage Haven to secure *Supporting People* pipeline funding to allow all-day opening;
- an open *Supporting People* Forum, established jointly with North Herts District Council;
- the refurbishment of its homelessness reception centre at North Road which provides 24-hour support to vulnerable households;
- the redevelopment of Ross Court, a low-demand traditional sheltered scheme to provide 13, two-bedroom bungalows for older persons.

PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Options Appraisal: Supporting Independence

The outcome of the Options Appraisal on the availability of resources and for that reason has the potential to affect investment in supported housing. Because the council has placed the countywide *Supporting People* Strategy at the centre of its overall approach to supported housing, the Options Appraisal is considering the impact of changes to the stockholding arrangements on this sector. It will also need to consider the impact of these changes on supported homes such as those for older people (900 units) and the homeless (e.g. the 30 units at Wellfield Court).

Meeting Needs: Existing Proposals

Plans to improve support to vulnerable people are strongly affected by the priorities and resources of the county *Supporting People* programme. The council has already secured *Supporting People* pipeline funding for Stevenage Haven in this first year of the programme. This represents a 'step change' in the provision of services for both single homeless people with support needs and rough sleepers.

Because future funding for other schemes cannot be guaranteed, and because the overall *Supporting People* pot of money is likely to decrease rather than increase, the council will encourage the establishment of new schemes that meet identified gaps in provision, particularly those gaps identified in the Homelessness Strategy.

The council has plans to:

- remodel its homelessness warden service to ensure it is compliant with the *Supporting People* quality standard;
- review its allocations policy including its special quota arrangements (5% of all lettings) for people with special needs and its access procedures for sheltered housing;
- work in partnership with Hightown Praetorian and Churches Housing Association to complete a 20-unit scheme for people with mental health problems;
- work in partnership with Aldwyck Housing Association to deliver five units of supported housing for young people at Peartree Way;
- ensure that the council's sheltered housing stock meets the needs of older people in the 21st century in tandem with the housing options process and is compliant with *Supporting People*;
- develop a Housing Strategy for Older People;
- implement recommendations covering various community services for older people provided by the Council;
- prioritise housing adapted for disabled persons when negotiating special needs elements in Section 106 negotiations (see Glossary);
- work with partners within the *Supporting People* programme to review the quality of local services across all support providers;
- enter into multi-agency protocols to cover all vulnerable groups.

It is necessary to meet the *Supporting People* quality standard in order to ensure funding contracts are renewed. Joint protocols will enable the council to share good practice with experienced and valued partners. Housing adapted for disabled people is an identifiable need and the District Plan requires the provision on certain allocated sites. The RSLs have been chosen partly because of the services they already provide in the town.

The council considers that developing services within the *Supporting People* programme is the best use of resources. It has no plans to develop outside it.

ACTION PLAN

To:

- ensure there is sufficient supported housing to meet the needs of all main service-user groups;
- ensure all supported housing is *Supporting People* compliant;
- extend joint protocols with key stakeholders to all vulnerable groups needing support;
- develop 10 homes specifically adapted for disabled persons,

PRIORITY FOUR : DELIVERING QUALITY AND CHOICE

Strategic Aim:

- to extend choice and improve the quality of housing available to local people.

THE CURRENT POSITION AND CONTEXT

The Importance of Quality and Choice

People should have the opportunity, wherever possible, to make positive, informed choices about where they live. The council believes that the best way it can make this a reality is to:

- improve the quality of its performance as a housing provider;
- enable and encourage better standards across all tenure types.

HOUSING MANAGEMENT IN STEVENAGE

The Council as Landlord

The council, which has 8,700 properties in management and over 1,000 leaseholders, has a very significant impact on the lives of many of the town's residents. The council's Housing *Business Plan* gives details on how it will meet its commitments to individual tenants, but its contribution to the wider Housing Strategy is also very important.

There are three main elements to the council's housing management service:

- **rent collection:** maximising the collection of rent is a major priority: income derived from rent provides the resources to deliver the housing service;
- **tenancy management:** placing the focus on the customer; for example, by meeting service standards relating to lettings, dealing with anti-social behaviour, and using Introductory Tenancies;
- **estate management:** tackling issues affecting the whole community.

Offering a high quality service can have a positive impact on the wider housing strategy.

The Registered Social Landlord Sector

The Stevenage Registered Social Landlord Charter provides common ground on which the council and RSLs can facilitate, provide and manage social housing. The charter is designed to ensure that services function cohesively and that standards are monitored and improved through application of the five Es:

- **economy** – getting value for money in service delivery;
- **efficiency** – deploying services to best effect;
- **effectiveness** – meeting strategic objectives;
- **equity of service** – enabling all sectors of the community to benefit from services;
- **empowerment** – enabling residents to participate in decisions.

RSL Liaison meetings are held quarterly to share information, develop good practice and benchmark services.

The Private Sector

Much of the housing stock in Stevenage was built relatively recently and this has an impact on the quality of accommodation in the private sector. The council's approach to the private sector is to improve and maintain management standards as well as tackle disrepair. Encouraging good practice in the private sector becomes ever more significant as the proportion of properties in this sector grows yearly. (It is currently 72% of total housing stock).

The Housing Advice Service can also help to drive up standards. It aims to improve private sector standards by:

- giving advice to landlords on rent increase procedures, possession proceedings and their legal rights and responsibilities;
- providing a landlord pack which covers gas and electrical checks, and issues of tenure;
- conducting joint inspections with landlord and tenant at the beginning and end of tenancies;
- giving advice on disrepair;
- encouraging good practice through a landlord forum.

Although there is not enough work to justify a full-time Tenancy Relations Officer, all Housing Advisors are TRO trained, and the council is a member of the Association of Tenancy Relations Officers. Last year the Housing Advice Team investigated three cases of harassment and illegal eviction under the Protection from Eviction Act (1977).

Choice for Those in Housing Need

People in housing need who approach the council usually hope to obtain a council Secure Tenancy or Registered Social Landlord Assured Tenancy. It is apparent that the level of demand for this type of housing greatly exceeds supply.

It is important that people are able to make informed choices on their housing options and that a choice of alternatives is available to those who need to be housed quickly as well as those who are able to take more time over their decision.

The Housing Advice Service promotes choice by:

- providing advice and assistance to customers in housing need;
- operating a tenancy deposit scheme; this provided 31 deposits in 2002/03;
- working in partnership with RELATE and Herts Young Homeless Group to provide a family mediation service; this service can help to prevent homelessness resulting from family breakdown;
- running a lodgings register which provides information on shared accommodation;
- making use of referral arrangements with emergency providers such as Stevenage Haven (a night shelter for the single homeless).

Housing Register – Choice Based Lettings

The council's established housing allocations policy determines priority by assessing housing need - offers of new homes are made to those with the highest priority. Although this 'Register and Allocate' system offers some scope for individual choice, it commits the applicant to a property without the opportunity to view it first. This situation is rarely found in other housing sectors and is a source of some user dissatisfaction

In March 2003, the council introduced choice-based lettings as a six-month pilot scheme. To help manage the change and to establish best practice, the pilot was at first limited to one-bedroom flats. In September 2003, it was extended for a further six months to include studio (bed-sitting room) flats.

The initial findings are positive and encouraging. The council receives an average of 50 bids for each available property. The methods used to advertise properties are still being developed, but already include use of the councils' new Customer Services Centre, the Internet and dedicated telephone lines.

The indications are that prospective tenants feel more empowered by making informed choices about their housing options. The council now publishes detailed data on the availability of property types by area, points level and turnover. It has implemented an allocations review, and is evaluating ways of extending Choice Based Lettings across all property types.

QUALITY AND CHOICE: PROGRESS AND DELIVERY

Improving Quality

Progress in delivering quality and choice has been driven by the council's Best Value Review, *Better Homes for Stevenage*. The following improvements in this area have been made:

- the transferring of cash collection from five locally run council offices to Post Office counters (there are 12 counters in Stevenage, and payments can be made anywhere in the UK);
- the opening of a One-Stop Shop housing service in the dedicated Customer Service Centre;
- the appointment of a dedicated Tenancy Enforcement Officer to deal with anti-social behaviour;
- the drawing up of a new tenancy contract in consultation with tenants;
- the introduction of a linked caretaking/environmental service to combat refuse and fly tipping on estates;
- the introduction of a dedicated leaseholder service and the establishment of a leaseholder forum;
- revision of the tenants' home decorations scheme following tenant consultation;
- the introduction of an improved tenants' newsletter;
- the introduction of Introductory Tenancies.

Extending Choice

Progress to date on the implementation of the council's *Best Value Review of Housing Needs*, concluded in 2000, includes:

- the transference of Housing Transfer and the Housing Register functions to a single dedicated team;
- the introduction of a Choice Based Lettings pilot for one-bedroom flats and bedsits (10% of all lettings);
- extensive use of the internet: all available properties are posted on the council's website, and over 50% of enquires now come this way;
- the introduction of a One-Stop Housing service within the Customer Service Centre;
- the introduction of continual improvement to the homelessness service; this involved a Beacon Bid (under the theme of *Tackling Homelessness*), which made the national final shortlist of 10;
- amending the council's allocation criteria for low-demand sheltered housing to allow applications from any older person in housing need who otherwise meets the criteria for the scheme; this includes applicants from outside the town;
- increasing the level of information on lettings, point levels and the availability of properties through improved tenant and applicant newsletters.

Arrangements for monitoring the quality of services and user satisfaction are in place. Questionnaires and freepost envelopes are sent to all homelessness applicants with formal decision letters. Housing Advice clients are similarly issued with a feedback questionnaire. Applicants who are offered tenancies are also given the opportunity to comment on the service received through a questionnaire. One example of services responding to the comments received was the rewriting of leaflets so that that clients found them easier to understand.

Other feedback mechanisms available to stakeholders, members and tenants include reports to the Housing & Wellbeing Scrutiny panel, MORI carry out a public opinion survey on behalf of the Council every two years, Joint Local Committees, Tenant Compacts, visioning events such as those held at Stonyhall and partner consultation.

PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Options Appraisal and Quality and Choice

The Options Appraisal's potential for affecting the authority's stockholding arrangement could profoundly affect the way in which services are delivered to tenants and applicants. Survey data indicates that over 90% of tenants are satisfied with the service currently provided. The survey was done as part of the Options Appraisal process. A sample of all tenants was used (8727 tenancies) and there was a 16% response (1396). Actual result was 62% very satisfied, 28% fairly satisfied, so overall 90% satisfied. The survey was carried out in April/May 2004. The council wants to ensure that any changes will maintain these levels of satisfaction as well as increase choice and improve (or at least maintain) the quality of service.

The Options Appraisal enables the council to consider the way in which services are delivered to applicants for housing. It will give priority to the issue of choice. The current choice-based lettings pilot for flats and studio flats may result in the scheme being rolled out across all properties. The council wants to ensure that any further extension of choice arising from the current pilot scheme and the allocations review is maintained following the conclusion of the Options Appraisal.

Finally, should the council adopt a stockholding option that results in more resources becoming available to meet housing need, these resources could be used to increase quality and choice, for example, by introducing a grant-to-vacate scheme where tenants receive financial incentives to buy on the open market, or under-occupation initiatives where tenants are encouraged to move to a smaller property.

Increasing Choice

Choice Based Lettings is a key element of the council's strategy to increase choice for all lettings in 2004. Other future options to increase choice include:

- introducing a single assessment to cover applicants on the Housing and Transfer Registers and the statutory homeless;
- extending access to programmes such as mediation and the Tenancy Deposit Scheme to all applicants in housing need, not just the statutory homeless;
- introducing a new allocations policy founded on Choice Based Lettings;
- making the mutual exchange register available on the internet;
- re-introducing an under-occupation incentive programme;
- re-introducing a scheme which offers a grant to vacate council properties;
- out-sourcing Housing Advice to an external provider;
- increasing and improving the range of supported housing to those who need it (this issue is covered in detail above);
- developing more housing with an intermediate tenure (in the light of findings from the *Housing Needs Survey*).

The overall effect of these plans would be to assess the needs of applicants within a single framework known as a Housing Gateway. The aim of this would be to ensure applicants are able to make informed choices about their future housing options.

Improving Quality

The council remains committed to the principles of continual improvement, and has plans for a number of initiatives. These are:

- a more co-ordinated approach to anti-social behaviour led by a dedicated Tenancy Enforcement Officer;
- the use of Introductory Tenancies from 2004;
- the introduction of a new Tenants' Handbook, developed in consultation with tenants;
- the introduction of Super Caretakers for larger blocks;
- the introduction of improvements in rent collection through an estate-based debt counselling/welfare rights service;
- consideration, in consultation with tenants and leaseholders, of a small-scale voluntary transfer for the Stonyhall Estate to a partner Registered Social Landlord. This will enable improvements to be made to the estate. Options include refurbishment or demolition and re-provision.

It is vital that residents and other partners are involved and have the opportunity to influence the work of the council in managing and developing housing services. How well the council manage to do this will be reflected in customer satisfaction levels and also future CPA inspections.



ACTION PLAN

To:

- maximise choice for all applicants in housing need;
- ensure high standards of housing management.

PRIORITY FIVE: ENABLING *DECENT HOMES*

Strategic Aim:

- to ensure that all homes in the town are of a decent standard.

CURRENT CONTEXT

The Housing Stock in Stevenage

At the end of the financial year, 2003/04 there were 33,750 dwellings in the town. Ownership of these properties breaks down as follows:

Owner Occupation	Housing Association	Private Rented	Local Authority
22,300	1,463	1,260	8,727

As noted in the introduction, these figures show that a housing revolution has taken place in the last 20 years: in that time over 20,000 homes have been transferred from council ownership to the private sector through the government's *Right to Buy* scheme. As noted above, ex-council homes are now bought and sold for prices beyond the means of many of the town's residents.

In 2003, the council's remaining stock holding was valued at £504.4 million and, as the figures above show, local authority homes still represent about 30% of the total, so the council retains a significant presence in the town.

Stock Condition: the Evidence Base

The current condition of the housing stock in Stevenage has been determined by:

- a Private Sector House Condition and Energy Efficiency Survey, 2001 conducted by Cambridge Housing and Environmental Consultants;
- a Local Authority Stock Condition Survey, 2001 undertaken by Hunter and Partners;
- A local authority *Stock Condition Survey 2003/04*.

The local authority survey was carried out in 2000 and was based upon a 10% stock sample across 822 property types. As the survey was commissioned prior to the publication of the *Decent Homes* criteria, work projections were based on the date that components were installed, and not on the overall fitness standards of properties.

The Condition of the Private Sector Stock

Stevenage homes were mostly built after 1945. About 95% of the private sector stock is post-war, and the majority of these dwellings are former local authority homes transferred under the government's *Right to Buy* scheme.

The 2001 *Stock Condition Survey* and the council's analysis of information derived from customer queries and requests have highlighted a number of issues:

- a total of 2.7% homes within the borough are considered unfit compared with a national average of 7.5%; in the private rented sector 14% are unfit as compared with a national average of 19%;
- the cost of immediate repairs to bring these properties up to the minimum fitness standard is £6.4m; to bring all dwellings up to a reasonable standard would cost £34m;
- nearly a quarter (150) of unfit dwellings are occupied by elderly households on low incomes, and there is a disproportionate number of older people occupying properties in substantial disrepair;
- a total of 1.4% dwellings are empty;
- The average SAP (energy efficiency) rating for the private sector is 53.7; this is higher than the UK average of 44;
- a total of 5.9% households contain at least one disabled person; to meet the needs of this group it is estimated that a Disabled Facilities Grant of £3.5m is required;
- in April 2004, 169 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) were identified in the town; of these, 12 were found to be unfit.

The Private Sector Stock Condition Survey also highlighted some unfitness in the Registered Social Landlord sector, although the sample was insufficient to allow any detailed conclusions to be drawn. This lack of information on a large and growing sector is a cause of concern. No further independent data on the sector as a whole is available at this time, although it is known that the stock is relatively new.

The Condition of the Local Authority Stock

At April 2004, the local authority stock profile stood as follows:

	Number of properties constructed				
	Pre 1945	1945-64	1965-74	1974-date	Total
Flats	9	3064			3073
Bungalows	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	445
Houses	166	4403	97	542	5208
					8726

As the table shows, the bulk of construction was carried out in Stevenage during a comparatively short period. The stock profile is typical of a new town, but is otherwise uncommon.

In July 2000, the government introduced the *Decent Homes* standard. Under *Decent Homes* a dwelling must:

- meet the statutory minimum standard for housing as defined by Section 604 of the Housing Act (1985);
- be in a reasonable state of repair;
- have reasonably modern facilities and services (e.g. kitchen and bathroom);
- provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

The council commissioned a Stock Condition Survey to be carried out by the Building Performance Group in April 2003. Phase one of the work, covering 10% of the stock was completed by April 2004; phase two, covering a further 10% was scheduled for completion in June 2004. The survey outcomes will inform the Options Appraisal.

Based on initial outcomes from the stock condition survey that have yet to be validated the council has assessed that there is a total need for £101m of investment over the next 10 years, and £360m over the next 30.

During the validation of the stock condition survey it became clear that the council needed to undertake a structural survey of non-traditional and system-built accommodation. This accounts for 25% of the council's stock. The survey is due to report in late 2004. It will inform the Options Appraisal.

Full details of these investment figures, and how they were calculated can be found in the Housing Business Plan. Other key findings are:

- the cost of planned maintenance for the total stock up to the end of the 30 year period in 2033 is £360m;
- major elements are heating and water (£65.7m), kitchens (£55.9m), windows (£53.3m), electrical (£38.8m) and bathrooms (£26.8m);
- the investment required to meet the 2010 target for improving all properties to the Decency Standard is £14.4m.

This table below is a summary of the *Decent Homes* survey findings:

Stock	Non-Decent at 2004 (%)	Potentially Non-Decent at 2004 (%)	Non-Decent at 2010 (%)	Potentially Non-Decent at 2010 (%)
8876	2846 (32%)	2830 (32%)	4869 (55%)	1868 (21%)

ENABLING DECENT HOMES: PROGRESS AND DELIVERY

The Private Sector

The key to making progress on the council's agenda for the private sector has been the publication in 2003 of the Private Sector Renewal Policy. This sets out the council's grant priorities. To date, the council has:

- extended older people's housing options by modifying its allocation policy: owner occupiers, previously ineligible, are now considered for sheltered housing (This decision was made in the context of a surplus of council accommodation for elderly people and the concentration of this same group in the most sub-standard private sector stock);
- reduced the number of empty properties from 131 to 80 through an empty property strategy, including the use of compulsory purchase where necessary;

- inspected all known HMOs and the reduced the number unfit from 11% to 7% of the total;
- increased the SAP (energy efficiency) ratings of around 1,300 properties in the private sector from of 53.7 to 63 (averages) with the assistance of energy efficiency grants;
- maintained customer satisfaction at levels of 95%;
- introduced home improvement loans, and reviewed grant repayment procedures: monies recycled are then ring-fenced for further improvements in the sector;
- doubled the overall level of investment for 2003/04;
- developed partnerships with the energy sector to increase investment in energy efficiency works;
- appointed an in-house Occupational Therapist to improve assessment of need.

Local Authority Homes

Over the past three years, capital investment in the council's housing stock has averaged £4.5m. The principal investment programmes have been:

- gas boiler replacement;
- electrical rewiring;
- window replacement;
- property refurbishment;
- cold water storage tank replacement;
- careline installation;
- fire alarms (upgrade and installation);
- subsidence work;
- communal lighting.

Additionally, the year 1998/99 saw the inclusion of £14m for replacement PVC windows. Total investment, including planned cyclical maintenance and responsive repairs, has averaged £8.9m per year.

Regeneration at Stonyhall

The council has identified the Stonyhall Estate as being suitable for regeneration. Despite the intense demand for affordable housing and the absence of 'hard-to-let' properties in the town, this estate remains unpopular. A combination of anti-social behaviour, outdated heating systems and hard-to-manage communal space is largely responsible for this. The estate also contains a high proportion of flats housing families, a situation which is untypical of a new town. Currently, the council is unable to fund the work needed to bring the estate up to the *Decent Homes* standard. Given the pressing need to improve the quality of life for residents, the council has decided to move forward with proposals for regeneration before the Options Appraisal has reached its conclusion.

Residents are engaged in a continuing dialogue about the future of their homes. Four RSLs were approached for their outline proposals and were then invited to bid against a detailed brief. William Sutton Housing Association (WSHA) was selected by a panel, which included residents. William Sutton Housing Association is now in consultation with residents on the design. This involves demolishing and replacing the existing buildings. Additional units for shared ownership and for sale will be incorporated into the redevelopment.

WSHA are in negotiation with the council. The tenants were balloted on the proposals for this small-scale voluntary transfer in November and December 2004. 86% of tenants

voted and 92% were in favour of the proposals, the transfer is scheduled to take place on 31 March 2005.

PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Local Authority Homes – The Options Appraisal

The principal purpose for the council's current Options Appraisal is to consider the best means of delivering one of its six Priorities: meeting the government's *Decent Homes* target by 2010. While the appraisal will consider the impact of various stock holding options upon the other five Priorities, meeting the government's requirements for *Decent Homes* will be the determining consideration.

Meeting the *Decent Homes* target by 2010 must therefore be viewed as the highest priority of the Housing Strategy.

Local Authority Stock: Future Plans

Until the completion of the Options Appraisal, the council will continue to invest all capital receipts in bringing the existing stock up to the required standard. Further details of this work can be found in the council's Housing *Business Plan*.

Private Sector: Future Plans

The council plans to:

- reduce the number of unfit HMOs to zero by April 2005;
- introduce a Handy Person's Scheme in partnership with Anchor Housing in 2004/05;
- commission a new Private Sector Stock Condition survey for 2006/07;
- consider the introduction of a Home Improvement Agency;
- reduce the number of long-term (5+ year) empty properties to zero by 2008.

After consideration, the council did not pursue the introduction of a registration scheme for HMOs, there being insufficient dwellings that lie within the scope of the legislation to justify it. Nor did it pursue the *House Proud* Equity Release Programme for tackling disrepair among owner-occupied properties with older owners: similar schemes have resulted in minimal, or no, take-up.

Registered Social Landlord Stock

The council will work with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) through the established RSL-liaison arrangements to identify stock in this sector that may fail to make the *Decent Homes* standard by 2010.

Because of the relative age of the stock (most of which was constructed in the last 10 years) the council does not believe that there is a serious stock condition issue among RSL properties. It nevertheless considers that, given the findings of the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey, and the relative lack of information about this sector, there is reason to keep the issue under review.

Meeting the Decent Homes standard and completing the Options Appraisal are government requirements. Tackling poor housing and energy efficiency in the private sector will help improve the health of residents. Demand for housing is obviously high

and it would make better use of a scarce resource if more empty homes could be brought back into use.

ACTION PLAN

To:

- ensure that all local social housing meets the *Decent Homes* standard by 2010;
- complete an Options Appraisal by 2005;
- tackle poor housing in the private sector;
- work to improve energy efficiency;
- tackle the issue of empty homes.

PRIORITY SIX: SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Strategic Aim:

- to tackle social exclusion, make sure there is equality of opportunity;
- encourage regeneration by providing quality housing services.

CURRENT POSITION AND CONTEXT

The Importance of a Joined-up Strategy

Meeting the housing needs and aspirations of residents can make an enormous contribution to individual and collective well being.

The task of making sure that communities are sustainable is highly complex and multi-faceted, which means that that the issues set out below are not exhaustive.

To achieve the overall aims of the Housing Strategy, it is necessary to consider the wider community agenda, and the following issues in particular:

- meeting the needs of a diverse multi-cultural community;
- tackling crime and anti-social behaviour;
- regenerating the town;
- developing communities;
- improving health.

The Housing Strategy is able to contribute to these aims in a number of ways.

THE DIVERSITY OF STEVENAGE

The Black and Minority Ethnic Community

Black and minority ethnic residents of Stevenage currently account for 5.4% of the town's population. This figure has risen from the 3.9% recorded in the 1991 census. The increase is more marked in certain wards. This includes some of the more deprived wards such as St. Nicholas.

	WHITE	MIXED	ASIAN OR ASIAN BRITISH	BLACK OR BLACK BRITISH	CHINESE OR OTHER
ENGLAND	90.9	1.3	4.6	2.1	0.9
STEVENAGE	94.6	1.4	2.1	1.2	0.7
Stevenage wards					
BANDLEY HILL	95.3	1.3	1	1.1	1.3
BEDWELL	94.2	1.4	2	1.5	0.9
CHELLS	94.9	1.6	1.7	1.1	0.7
LONGMEADOW	97	1.1	0.9	0.7	0.3
MANOR	95.3	1	1.7	1.1	0.9
MARTINS WOOD	94	1.5	2.7	1.3	0.5
OLD TOWN	94.1	1.4	3.5	0.6	0.4
PIN GREEN	94.8	1.5	1.7	1.6	0.3
ROEBUCK	96.5	1.2	1.1	0.8	0.4
SHEPHALL	95.7	1.6	1.2	1.1	0.4
ST.NICHOLAS	92.5	1.8	3.2	2.1	0.4
SYMONDS GREEN	95.2	1.3	2.1	0.8	0.6
WOODFIELD	89	2	5	1.4	2.6

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

The total increase in the black and minority ethnic population in Stevenage since 1991 is greater than the increase within the social housing sector. The reason for this is clear: because local demands on housing are high, the council has only been able to accept inward migration through nomination schemes (such as HOMES) on a very small scale. Such a large increase in the black and ethnic minority population cannot be wholly accounted for by demographic trends (birth and death rates) within Stevenage. The explanation must lie largely in an incoming population who are moving into private-sector accommodation (owner occupation and private renting).

An analysis of the Housing Register and the records of the Homelessness/Housing Advice Service suggest that housing need levels among black and ethnic minority groups are proportionate to the population as a whole, a trend borne out by the 2004 Housing Needs Survey.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

There is no significant population of asylum seekers in the town. The situation is kept under review.

CRIME AND DISORDER

Anti-Social Behaviour

Tenants, applicants and other housing stakeholders rated anti-social behaviour as the greatest single area of concern during the council's 2002 consultation exercise. Its 2003 *Have a Say Day* (now an annual event) confirmed that this is still an important issue to stakeholders. The council has highlighted it accordingly as a key concern.

The Stevenage Community Safety Strategy outlines how the council is tackling anti-social behaviour in a holistic, multi-agency way. As this high-profile issue is linked with the housing agenda it also forms a key theme of this strategy.

The council's Fourth Priority, Quality and Choice, which outlines its approach to tenancy management, centres on forms of anti-social behaviour (such as noise nuisance, threatening and abusive language and behaviour, vandalism, graffiti and fly tipping). This will remain a focus for the next five years.

Domestic Violence

The council gives particular priority to the issue of domestic violence, as it has done for over 20 years - ever since it first grant-funded Stevenage and North Herts Women's Aid to provide local refuge space. The council also works with partners and stakeholders through the Stevenage and North Herts Domestic Violence Forum to co-ordinate activity and initiatives across the Borough and the neighbouring North Herts District Council area. Last year, the council accepted 9% of households as homeless as a result of violence or harassment.

REGENERATION AND RENEWAL

Physical Regeneration

The town was originally planned as a network of neighbourhoods, each having a retail and social centre intended to meet local need. Increased car usage and other changes in lifestyle have undermined this vision. These centres are now subject to a comprehensive review.

A review of the town centre itself, which was developed in parallel with the neighbourhood centres, is also well under way. A preferred development partner has been appointed and a draft regeneration plan published. The scheme includes over 1,000 new dwellings, some of which will be affordable housing. The council is keen to balance aspects of these proposals, which are concerned with economic regeneration with the affordable housing needs of the community.

As there is a lack of residential development sites in the town, these reviews are a major opportunity to develop affordable housing on brownfield sites, and to deliver physical regeneration fit for 21st-century living.

Community Development – Tackling Social Exclusion

Community development programmes target disadvantaged groups and promote social inclusion and welfare. For Stevenage, which has some of the poorest wards in Hertfordshire, the problem of social exclusion remains an important issue, and it remains at the very heart of this strategy. Community development and social inclusion are linked thematically at many points.

Qualified to degree level or higher 15.1% compared to an England & Wales average of 19.8% (Census 2001).

As part of its commitment to the *Supporting People* programme, the council will be developing service user involvement schemes within its supported accommodation. These are designed to counter the lingering effects of social stigma and social exclusion. Where appropriate, these schemes will explore ways of encouraging service users to integrate more fully into the community.

Of particular importance are:

- tenant participation, which increases community participation and encourages inclusion;
- action to improve and maintain the quality of homes;
- action to tackle crime and disorder, e.g. pro-active housing management;
- anti-poverty initiatives provided through the Benefits and Money Advice services (run by the Housing Advice Service and developed through the Community Legal Services Partnership);
- education and information schemes, such as the schools-visit programme run by the council's Homelessness and Housing Advice Teams.

Health Improvement

The Stevenage Health and Community Partnership has published a three-year Health Improvement Plan.

No significant link between house condition and health has been found, though evidence does suggest a link between health and the concentrations of poverty and social exclusion found in the social housing sector.

The main factors relating to health in a housing context are teenage pregnancy (which is a trigger factor leading to homelessness), care of the elderly (requiring specialist provision) and drug and alcohol abuse (particularly in the context of anti-social behaviour).

PROGRESS AND DELIVERY, PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Equality

The council has published details of a Race Equality Scheme, which sets out proposals to promote equality and challenge discrimination. All service areas, including housing, are involved in the scheme. The housing and other services are working towards fulfilling the council's wider purpose to develop an initial Equality and Diversity Action Plan, which will be published in 2004.

The council has also:

- improved disabled access with the opening of its new Customer Service Centre;
- provided translation services through Language Line;
- published regular details of allocations by ethnic breakdown;
- achieved Level One of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

For its future priorities, the council aims:

- to achieve Levels Two and above of the Equality Standard;
- to examine information on black and minority ethnic groups provided by the new Housing Needs Survey;
- to give appropriate weight to the needs and aspirations of the black and minority ethnic community when reviewing its allocations policy.

Crime and Disorder

The council has:

- appointed a dedicated Tenancy Enforcement Officer to tackle anti-social behaviour among tenants;
- worked in partnership with Hightown Praetorian and Churches Housing Association to provide nine refuge spaces for women fleeing domestic violence in two newly refurbished buildings;
- issued a new tenancy contract, which identifies the tenant's responsibilities with regard to anti-social behaviour in much greater detail;
- prioritised security as part of its Private Sector Renewal Policy;
- begun to use of Introductory Tenancies (from 2004).

A future plan is:

- the publication of a corporate anti-social behaviour and harassment policy.

Regeneration and Renewal

Progress on regeneration and renewal includes:

- proposals to regenerate the town centre and the neighbourhoods;
- work with tenants and leaseholders, Registered Social Landlords and the government to regenerate the Stonyhall Estate.

Community Development

Initiatives to develop the community include:

- the appointment of a dedicated Tenant Participation Officer; this has led to the formation of seven new tenant representative groups;
- work on debt and welfare rights (the Housing Advice Team worked with 754 tenants and applicants in 2002/03).

Health Improvement

To tackle teenage pregnancy the council has:

- set up 30 units of supported housing for homeless young parents; this service provides 24-hour support and offers guidance to enable resettlement in the community;
- worked with partners on the local Teenage Pregnancy Implementation Group; the group is developing a multi-agency approach to reducing local levels of teenage pregnancy and providing appropriate support and resettlement services.

The Options Appraisal

For the Options Appraisal to be a meaningful, all-embracing and inclusive process, it must address the impact of its decision on the wider community at all levels. The council will especially consider the appraisal's impact on and its contribution to tackling:

- crime and disorder;
- equality issues, particularly equality of access to housing;
- the regeneration of the town;
- the health of the town in a housing context.

Black and ethnic minority communities are an increasing population according to the latest census. Contributing to a 'Safer Stevenage' links to the Council's wider objectives and the aims of the LSP. At Stonyhall the RSL partner was selected after a process of consultation with residents, who with the aid of an Independent Tenant Advisor made the final partner selection.

ACTION PLAN

To:

- ensure the housing needs and aspirations of the black and ethnic minority community are met; enable housing services to contribute to a 'Safer Stevenage'enable neighbourhood regeneration and health improvement to take place.

SECTION FOUR: DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

RESOURCING DELIVERY

Resourcing the Strategy, Options Appraisal

The council will only achieve the goals set out in its Action Plan if it has sufficient resources to deliver them. Its strategic approach is now at a major crossroads: decisions which need to be taken within the life of this Action Plan will have a major, and probably irreversible, effect on the longer-term direction of the Housing Strategy.

The Options Appraisal will determine the future stock investment programme under *Decent Homes*, and the ownership and management arrangements for council housing (these determinations, in turn, will have far reaching strategic consequences). The outcome of the appraisal could also have a major impact on the resources available for other priority projects, such as investment in new affordable homes, private-sector regeneration and initiatives to tackle crime and disorder, social exclusion and the environment; in short, on all aspects of the Housing Strategy.

The Action plan sets out the possible impact of the Options Appraisal on the priorities of the Housing Strategy and makes it clear that the council is keeping all the options open.

The council's evaluation of the resources available to deliver the strategy is provisional until the outcome of the Options Appraisal is announced.

How Resources are Deployed: the Decision-Making Process

The council has adopted a cabinet system, which invests day-to-day decisions in an Executive Committee. The Executive Committee consists of the leader and deputy-leader of the council and seven portfolio holders. To reflect its importance within the council, housing has its own portfolio holder.

The Scrutiny and Review Panel is responsible for overseeing executive decisions and performance and the Housing Scrutiny and Wellbeing Panel is responsible for overseeing housing.

Certain key functions of the executive committee are delegated to officers: the Head of Housing has a day-to-day responsibility for allocations, homelessness and housing advice, tenancy management, the capital programme and the Right to Buy scheme.

The council sets an annual budget in accordance with the statutory framework. It is through this budgetary process that resources (e.g. capital receipts) are prioritised. The council has reaffirmed that its overriding priority for 2004/05 remains the *Decent Homes* programme. The Council's Plans are reviewed and updated annually in the light of changing priorities and resources, but provision of good housing for all remains a key priority. The Capital Strategy provides the framework for formulating, prioritising and managing the Capital Programme and Resources. The Council's established priorities are translated into requirements for capital investment through the corporate business strategy and service plans. Capital priorities are established within Housing and submitted to the Council's Corporate Capital Review Group. Investment needs are prioritised and ranked by testing against a range of criteria and evaluation processes and are progressed through the capital forward planning process. Priority assessment rating is against key strategic importance and urgency taking into account risk of failure, cost and complexity. The Capital Forward Plan is reviewed by the Council's Chief Officer

Programme Management Board and ultimately approved by the Executive and/or Full Council. The Council manages its capital activities under two blocks – General Fund and Housing. Where applicable the Council considers its overall capital resource allocation corporately, but against the background that a number of significant sources of capital funding are earmarked to the HRA or Housing i.e. transitional receipts pooling, Major Repairs Allowance, Supporting People funding, specific grants. In-line with its key objectives the Council has currently allocated significant resources to Housing within its Capital Strategy. The current level of allocation will be reviewed subject to the outcome of the HRA Stock Condition Survey.

Capital Finance Projections

The council secures financial resources for capital investment in housing from a number of sources. These are then deployed to meet its key strategic priorities. The council's current Housing Capital Programme proposals for the period 2004/05 to 2007/08 are set out below.

Programme	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Decent Homes	6,495	5,906	3,987	***	***	***	***
Other HRA capital schemes	2,897	7,992	7,513	***	***	***	***
Total HRA	9392	13,898	11,500	9,383	9,195	6,894	6,852
Improvement grants	472	510	730	285	285	285	285
Affordable housing	0	250	0	250	0	0	0
Other General Fund housing	442	805	350				
Total Housing	10,306	15,463	12,580	9,918	9,480	7,179	7,137

*** The precise split between HRA Capital and Decent Homes will depend upon the Stock Condition Survey and the supplementary evidence being gathered.

Within this period (2004/05 to 2007/08), the council anticipates capital income from the following housing-related sources:

- some £22m in allowances for repairs paid by central government (Major Repairs Allowance);
- about £16m from *Right to Buy* sales (once receipt pooling is taken into consideration);

- £2m in windfall payments from the *Supporting People* programme;
- £1.4m from other government grants;
- £0.6m from the HRA as Revenue Contributions to capital outlay.

In addition, the council anticipates that receipts will also be generated over this period from the sale of certain General Fund assets, and it has accumulated receipts available from previous years. The allocation of these resources has yet to be fully determined and the outcome of the HRA Stock Condition Survey and Options Appraisal process will be major factors to be taken into account.

Housing Revenue Account

The estimated rental income for 2004/05 is £27m. These monies are used to fund day-to-day repairs, maintenance and management.

The HRA is 'ring fenced', that is, the income received from rents *must* be spent on the council's housing stock. As council stock currently makes up about 28% of all dwellings in the town, rent income derived from lettings is the single largest funding stream available to deliver this strategy. More details on the HRA can be found in the council's Business Plan.

Other Council Assets

The council's Asset Management Plan contributes to the Housing Strategy by making land available for affordable development at below-market cost. The council has resolved that on land which it has sold off for housing development, 40% of properties will be set aside for affordable dwellings; this compares with a planning requirement of 25% on developments, generally. For example, an estimated subsidy of £1.75m on the Brittain Way site will deliver Around 50 affordable units.

By making extensive use of harder-to-let dwellings (such as larger properties above shops) the council has worked with partnership agencies to provide specialist housing. For example, properties have been leased at below-market cost to provide a night shelter, two women's refuges, two supported projects for young people and one for people with mental health problems. The equivalent new-build cost of these programmes would have been many times the actual refurbishment costs. The council has also converted an unpopular sheltered housing scheme for older people into supported housing for young parents. The increased revenue income in the first year alone offset any capital costs associated with the scheme.

The Private Sector

The council's planning policies require 25% of new dwellings on all larger sites to be affordable. Since 2000, private developers have helped deliver around 50 affordable homes through this mechanism; a further 67 are possible within the current District Plan allocation.

At Stevenage West (see page 22) the council has worked with a development consortium to agree levels of affordable development in advance of planning permission being granted for the site. It has been agreed that 27.5% of homes will be affordable and land will be transferred to the selected RSL at 55% of its open-market value. In addition, the developers will agree a contract to build at sub-market rates. This agreement could represent a private-sector subsidy for affordable homes in excess of £10m.

Working With Partners

The council enables affordable homes to be developed by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). The RSLs then own and manage the properties, but the council generally obtains the right to nominate applicants from its housing registers to 100% of them. In 2004/05 direct RSL investment in affordable housing amounted to £1.4m.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Housing Corporation

The latest Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme covers the period from 2004-06. The total grant for Stevenage schemes is £3,108,564 and will provide 70 social rented, 22 shared ownership, 26 key worker and 2 Homebuy dwellings.

In addition, the council is working with North Herts District Council to develop a scheme at North-East Stevenage ("NES2") in partnership with Guinness Trust. The proposed development of 67 units (split 50/50 between the two authorities) attracted around £3m in the 2004 bidding round.

The Housing Partnership

The Housing Partnership is a collaboration between English Partnerships (EP) and two Registered Social Landlords to develop affordable homes on English Partnerships-owned land. The council is working closely with English Partnerships to develop affordable housing on some of its local sites. It is in discussion with Genesis Housing (English Partnerships' preferred partner) to deliver as many as 200 affordable homes at no cost to the local authority. Of these, 100, about half, are likely to be for rent. The investment value of these schemes, in cash terms, is likely to exceed £5m

Local Authority Social Housing Grant: Transitional Programme

Under the transitional programme that followed the withdrawal of Local Authority Social Housing Grant, the council supported successful bids of £824,000

Growth Area Delivery Grant

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has announced that about £5m will be invested in Stevenage through this funding stream, starting in 2004/05.

Special Grants

The council has been successful in securing a number of ring-fenced grants. These include Section 93 Homelessness Grant (£19,000 in 2003/04) and *Supporting People* Implementation Grant (£19,000 in 2002/03 and 2003/04).

OTHER RESOURCES

Local Authority Partners

The council has worked in partnership with other local authorities to identify and meet housing need. Recent examples of inter-agency working include:

- the joint-commissioning of a Housing Needs Study for the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region in partnership with the other sub-regional authorities;
- cross-authority working with North Herts. District Council at North-East Stevenage to deliver affordable homes tailored to the needs of both authorities;
- joint-working with the 10 Hertfordshire authorities and Hertfordshire County Council to develop a county-wide *Supporting People* strategy and to ensure adequate funding of supported services locally;
- working with Hertfordshire County Council to commission a Key Worker Housing Study.

Staffing Resources

Delivering the strategy requires the input and effort of many people working in a number of service areas. The Action Plan Summary indicates the lead officer for each priority. Goals will only be achieved by across-the-board input. To make sure this happens, the council has recently reorganised the Housing Division into four distinct units:

- Housing Needs and Strategy who work on affordable homes, special needs, housing and homelessness, and who are responsible for delivering quality services and choice to housing applicants;
- Tenancy Services who make sure that a high quality of service is provided to council tenants, and who contribute to tackling crime and disorder and social exclusion;
- Housing Property Services who are responsible for stock maintenance and *Decent Homes*;
- Central Housing Services who provide operational support as well as delivering services to leaseholders.

Environmental Services has a role in improving the condition of stock in the private sector, making environmental improvements and minimising empty properties. The Housing Division liaises closely with the Planning and Estates Divisions to deliver new affordable homes, and with the Community Development Section to tackle social exclusion, crime and disorder.

Delivery of the strategy is estimated to involve up to 70 people at any one time. The areas covered include Housing Needs and Strategy, Housing Management,

Environmental Health and Community Development. The staffing budgets associated with these functions exceed £1.5m each year.

Additional Resources

Key elements of the Housing Strategy will only be achieved if additional resources can be found. The council is not currently investing significant cash resources in new affordable housing and is reliant on funding from other sources. None of these streams are guaranteed.

The Options Appraisal will evaluate how existing resources are best deployed and consider the funding possibilities arising from other stock-holding arrangements.

The ability to deliver the strategy will be determined by the outcome of the Options Appraisal. The Action Plan identifies those areas where a clear and known gap in resources exists.

MONITORING DELIVERY

Monitoring Delivery

The Housing Strategy Action Plan is fundamental to the delivery of the Housing Strategy. Progress against this Action Plan will be monitored in a variety of ways:

- each individual target will be overseen by a responsible officer;
- the Housing Strategy Group led by the Head of Housing will take overall responsibility for the Action Plan and Housing Strategy;
- tenants and leaseholders, their representatives and other stakeholders will be regularly kept abreast of progress by a variety of means; these include a number of inter-related forums:
 - FOSTA;
 - individual tenants groups;
 - the Registered Social Landlord Liaison Forum;
 - the Homelessness Forum;
 - the Leaseholder Forum;
 - the Private Sector Landlord Forum;
- the council will also publish updates in our tenants' and housing applicants' newsletters *Housing for You* and *Rehousing News*;
- council members will implement the Housing Strategy Action Plan through the Housing and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel and, where appropriate, the Executive Committee.
- the Government Office of the East of England will assess this strategy to ensure it is 'fit for purpose'; the previous strategy, published by the council in 2003, was rated as 'average'; the year before that it was rated 'below average'. This latest strategy builds on that improvement and incorporates feedback from previous assessments.

A review date of June 2005 has been set for formally evaluating progress in delivering the Housing Strategy. The Housing Strategy Group led by the Head of Housing will meet bi-monthly between publishing the strategy and the review date in order to update and develop the Housing Strategy further. A performance update report will be produced for the review.

APPENDIX ONE: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ADP	See Approved Development Programme
Affordable Housing	A general term for housing made available to rent or buy at a cost below market rent. Such housing is generally provided by Registered Social Landlords or Local Authorities on a not-for-profit basis
Approved Development Programme (ADP)	A programme of investment in affordable housing . The housing is developed by Registered Social Landlords, and funded by the Housing Corporation.
Best Value	A statutory review which ensures that council services are provided in the most efficient way possible and give value for money
Brownfield Site	Land previously used and recycled for new development
Challenge Funding	A government-funded scheme to enable Registered Social Landlords to deliver affordable housing
Choice Based Lettings	A system of allocating affordable homes that provides greater individual applicant choice
Community Safety Partnership	A multi-agency partnership to tackle issues of crime and anti-social behaviour
Community Strategy	A Local Strategic Partnership strategy to deliver the key priorities of the community
Crashpad Scheme	A scheme which makes short-term emergency lodgings available to homeless young people usually in a private homes
Decent Homes	A government programme which requires social housing to be brought up to the <i>Decent Homes</i> standard by 2010
Disability Discrimination Act	Legislation designed to prevent the unfair treatment of people with disabilities
Disabled Facilities Grant	A grant to enable specialist adaptations for disabled people
English Partnerships	The government's national regeneration agency
EP	See English Partnerships
Equalities Standard	A government framework which helps local authorities develop a comprehensive and systematic approach to dealing with equalities issues
FOSTA	Federation of Stevenage Tenants Associations – the umbrella group of the seven Stevenage tenants associations

Growth Areas	Areas of the country earmarked for higher levels of development
GADG	Growth Area Delivery Grant: a government scheme to fund affordable housing in Growth Areas (See Growth Areas)
Homelessness Strategy	The council's strategy on Homelessness which it is required to produced by the Homelessness Act (2002)
Housing Association	See Registered Social Landlord
Housing Corporation	The government agency that funds, regulates and monitors Registered Social Landlords
Housing Gateway	A way of prioritising people in need of housing. It includes all available housing options in a single assessment
Housing Register	A list of applicants wanting affordable housing
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	The pool of money derived from council tenants rent payments.
HRA	See Housing Revenue Account
Key workers	People employed in jobs which have a particular importance to the general community e.g. nurses, teachers
Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG)	Grant paid by the council to an Registered Social Landlord to develop affordable homes
Local Plan	A local plan sets out a council's policies for guiding and controlling the way that buildings and land are used and developed
Local Strategic Partnership	A forum of organizations in the town which endorses and monitors the Community Strategy
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)	The government department responsible for housing and planning policy (among other things)
Planning Gain	See Section 106 agreements (S106)
PPG3	Government planning guidance
PSL (Private Sector Leasing)	Property leased to house homeless families
Quality Mark	An accreditation award for advice agencies
Receipt pooling	A system in which a proportion of a local authority's receipts from Right to Buy sales are paid over (pooled) to central government
Regional Housing Strategy	A strategic housing framework that sets out the priorities for a region of the UK. Stevenage is part of the Eastern Region.

Registered Social Landlord (RSL)	Not-for-profit housing providers regulated by the Housing Corporation
Right to Buy	A scheme which allows qualifying council tenants to buy the homes they live in
RSL	See Registered Social Landlord
SAP rating	A rating of the energy efficiency of a dwelling
Section 106 Agreement (S106)	An agreement between the council and developers pursuant to a planning application. S106 agreements often specify a proportion of affordable housing as a condition of planning permission
Shared ownership	A form of affordable housing where the applicant purchases a proportion of a home while the rest remains in the ownership of an Registered Social Landlord . This makes home ownership more affordable
Sheltered Housing	Housing for older people
Special Needs	A general term for groups of clients with specific housing needs e.g., people with mental illness needing support, young people needing support, those with a disability.
SRB5	The Single Regeneration Budget is the fifth round of funding for the regeneration of deprived areas. In Stevenage the Shephall and Bedwell areas received SRB money.
Stock condition Survey	A technical survey of the condition of dwellings to determine defects and establish the level of maintenance investment required over the longer term
Supporting People	A means-tested government programme which provides subsidies to help people pay for their housing-related support (this covers support provided by hostels, sheltered schemes, learning disability accommodation, etc)
Tenant participation	A process whereby a landlord is advised of the views and priorities of tenants
Windfall sites	Sites not specifically identified as available in the local plan or previously developed sites that become available unexpectedly

APPENDIX TWO: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Document	Organisation	Contact
Homelessness Strategy, 2003 – 2008	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Housing Needs Survey, 2004	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Hertfordshire Housing Study, 2002	SBC (plus the nine other Hertfordshire District authorities)	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Stock Condition Survey	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey, 2001	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Asset Management Plan	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Best Value Review: Housing Needs	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Best Value Review: <i>Better Homes for Stevenage</i>	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Best Value Review: Caretaking Service	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Sustainable Communities: <i>Building for the Future</i>	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)	www.odpm.gov.uk
Quality and Choice: <i>A Decent Home for All</i>	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)	www.odpm.gov.uk
London Commuter Belt Sub-Regional Strategy	SBC (plus the 9 other Hertfordshire District authorities & 5 Essex authorities)	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Housing Corporation Investment Strategy	Housing Corporation	www.housingcorp.gov.uk
Hertfordshire <i>Supporting People</i> Strategy	Hertfordshire County Council	www.herts-direct.gov.uk
Stevenage Local District Plan	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Community Strategy	SBC and the Stevenage Partnership	www.stevenagepartnership.org.uk
Community Safety Strategy	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk

Document	Organisation	Contact
Health Improvement Plan	North Herts and Stevenage Primary Care Trust	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Stevenage Housing Business Plan	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk
Private Sector renewal Strategy	SBC	www.stevenage.gov.uk

APPENDIX THREE: KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Name of Group	Membership	Purpose	Meets
Stakeholder Consultative Forum	See Appendix Four	Consultation and monitoring of delivery of the Housing Strategy	Annually
Local Strategic Partnership	Representatives of voluntary, community and statutory groups	Development and implementation of the Community Strategy	Quarterly
Herts Housing Officers	Senior Housing Officers from Hertfordshire's 10 borough and district authorities	To develop cross authority working	Quarterly
Stevenage Special Needs Panel	Stevenage Borough Council, Social Services	Partnership working to meet the housing needs of clients with special needs and those requiring supported housing	Monthly
Community Safety Partnership	Representatives of voluntary, community and statutory groups including police and social services	Development and implementation of the Community Safety Strategy	Monthly
<i>Supporting People</i> Commissioning Body & Core Strategy Development Group	Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire's 10 borough and district authorities, plus Health and Probation	Implementation of the <i>Supporting People</i> regime and development of support services	Monthly
London Commuter Belt Sub-Region Partnership	The 15 borough and district authorities within the sub-region	Development of sub-regional working and the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy	Quarterly
Stevenage Homelessness Forum	Representatives of voluntary, community and statutory groups	To monitor and implement the Homelessness Strategy	Bi-annually
Community Legal Services Partnership	Representatives of voluntary, community and statutory groups	Ensuring that information and advice about their legal rights is available to those who need it	Quarterly
RSL Liaison Group	RSLs, The Housing Corporation	Sharing of good practice, consultation and liaison on management and development issues	Quarterly

Name of Group	Membership	Purpose	Meets
Hertfordshire Development Officers Group	Development Officers from the 10 borough and district authorities	Sharing of good practice	Quarterly
Domestic Violence Forum	Representatives of voluntary, community and statutory groups with a particular interest in this issue e.g. police, Crown Prosecution Service, Women's Aid, Relate, Social Services	Developing good practice, awareness raising	Every other month
Herts Homeless Officers Group	Homelessness Managers from the 10 Districts of Hertfordshire	Information sharing, development of Best practice on homelessness issues	Quarterly
Herts Young Homeless Group	Representatives of voluntary, community and statutory groups with a particular interest in this issue e.g. Shelter, Social Services, RSLs, supported housing providers, Herts Young Homeless Group	Development of services to young homeless people	Monthly
Private Sector Landlord Forum	Private landlords, council staff	Information sharing	Annually
Stevenage & North Herts Supporting People Forum	Representatives of voluntary, community and statutory groups with a particular interest in this issue	Information sharing	Quarterly
Health Improvement and Modernisation Plan Task Force	Representatives from Health, Social Services, the voluntary sector, NHDC, SBC	Sharing of good practice	Quarterly

APPENDIX FOUR: STEVENAGE HOUSING CONSULTATIVE FORUM

We would like to thank all those who have helped us to produce this Housing Strategy:

Age Concern Stevenage	Lister Hospital Social Work Team
Aldwyck Housing Association	Mid-Point
The Anchor Trust	NACRO
Benefits Agency	North Herts District Council
Circle 33 Housing Trust	North Herts & Stevenage Primary Care Trust
Connexions Hertfordshire	Open Door
Co-op Homes	Paradigm Housing Group
Dacorum Borough Council	POhWER
Drugline	REACT
East & North Herts NHS Trust	Riversmead Housing Association
East and North Herts NHS Trust Community Drug & Alcohol Team	The Sanctuary
Face 2 Face	Shelter Hertfordshire
Federation of Stevenage Tenants Associations (FOSTA)	Stevenage Carers Support
The Guinness Trust	Stevenage Citizens Advice Bureau
Hanover Housing Association	Stevenage CVS
Hastoe Housing Association	Stevenage Haven
Hertfordshire Constabulary	Stevenage & North Herts Community Support Team
Hertfordshire County Council (Adult Care Services)	Stevenage & North Herts Women's Resource Centre
Hertfordshire County Council (Children, Schools & Families)	Stevenage Probation Service
Hertfordshire County Council (Community Mental Health Team)	Stevenage Women's Aid

Hertfordshire County Council (Extra Care & Housing)	Stevenage Young Carers Group
Hertfordshire County Council (Learning Disabilities Team)	Stevenage Youth Housing Link
Hertfordshire County Council (<i>Supporting People</i> Team)	Solo Housing Management
Hertfordshire County Council (Youth Services)	St Albans City & District Council
Hertfordshire Youth Justice Service	St Pancras & Humanist Housing Association
Hertsmere Borough Council	Stort Valley Housing Association
Herts Health Action With the Homeless	Warden Housing Association
Herts Young Homeless Group	Watford Borough Council
Hightown Praetorian & Churches Housing Association	Welwyn and Hatfield Council
The Housing Corporation	William Sutton Housing Association
Housing 21	Young Citizens Project
Living Room Project	

APPENDIX FIVE: AFFORDABLE HOUSING SITES & FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Affordable Housing Schemes on Site

Ross Court. This scheme is being built by the William Sutton Housing Association, one of the council's RSL partners. Thirteen two-bedroom bungalows will replace a sheltered housing complex that was outdated and unsuitable for its purpose. The Housing Corporation have provided £467,212 Social Housing Grant to fund the scheme, and a further £81,000 has been found through recycled grant. Completion is expected in January 2005. The new scheme will incorporate individual fire sprinkler systems

Round Diamond School. The Guinness Trust, another of the council's RSL partners, is providing 15 houses on this site (10 with three bedrooms and five with two bedrooms). Three key-worker dwellings are also to be built. Although unsuccessful in the 2002/03 Approved Development Programme (ADP) bid round, the scheme went ahead with funding provided by transitional Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) in October 2003. Handover was in December 2004.

Knebworth Lane. These 2 social rented flats were handed over in November 2004 on a small development. These represent a 'windfall,' as there is no planning requirement for affordable housing on this site. Aldwyck Housing Association is the partner RSL. Unsuccessful ADP bid, RSL used Recycled Capital Grant Fund.

In 2003, Warden Housing Association, another partner RSL, was awarded £761,674 by the 2002/03 Approved Development Programme for a scheme of acquisition and work. This enabled Warden to purchase 10 houses on the open market and let them to nominees from the council's housing registers. Warden worked in partnership with the council, and the programme was linked to the Empty Property Strategy. This enabled the targeting of private sector homes that were unoccupied or in disrepair.

Pipeline Affordable Housing Schemes

The table below sets out the bids submitted for 2004/05 Approved Development Programme funding:

The Council is remarketing this site after the developer withdrew.

Brittain Way. The council is currently marketing this development with a requirement that 50% of the housing on the site should be affordable. The successful developer is working with William Sutton Housing Association to deliver the affordable dwellings. This scheme will deliver 60 units of which 20 will be for key workers Successful ADP bid - £540,000

Oxleys Road. This site is allocated in the Local Plan for special needs housing. Hightown Praetorian and Churches, another of the council's RSL partners, plans to build 20 units of specialist accommodation for people with mental health problems. Successful ADP bid - £1,188,511

Peartree Way. Aldwyck Housing, an RSL partner, is proposing to demolish an existing hostel to provide specialist accommodation for young people. This was an unsuccessful ADP bid. Awarded £250,000 LA capital grant.

North- East Stevenage (NES) 1 & 2. This consists of two sites mostly owned by the neighbouring North Herts District Council (NHDC). Stevenage Borough Council has been working in partnership with NHDC and Hertfordshire County Council to ensure the sustainable delivery of affordable homes on these strategic sites at north-east Stevenage. Part successful ADP bid.

Growth Areas Delivery Grant

In 2004 the ODPM expanded the Communities Plan Growth Area to include Stevenage. This allowed the council to bid for, and obtain, Growth Area Delivery Grant (GADG), which now contributes towards the funding of growth set out in the Communities Plan.

The following bids, amounting to £4.8m have been given initial approval:

Manulife House This is a derelict office block in private ownership situated on the edge of Stevenage town centre, and adjoining a fire and ambulance station. The council is working with English Partnerships to purchase and develop Manulife House and the neighbouring sites. GADG will be used to assemble the land. The project will yield about 100 new dwellings: the majority will be affordable, and these will be divided between rented, shared ownership and key worker housing.

Ridgemoor Park This is a one-hectare site occupied by school buildings, which have been adapted for use as a training centre. The extensive refurbishment now needed by these buildings is not considered to offer value for money. Instead, the training centre will be relocated and 90 homes will be developed on the site. Thirty-five of these will be affordable housing.

Austen Paths On this site, a small neighbourhood shopping centre owned by the council will be demolished and replaced with 24 units of affordable housing. These will be evenly split between rented and shared ownership properties.

English Partnership Sites: Challenge Fund

The newly formed Housing Partnership of The Housing Corporation and English Partnerships (see Glossary) has been established to fund affordable homes. It will use a new investment scheme known as the Challenge Fund. The following two sites in Stevenage are to be developed under this programme

Fairview Road Playing Fields. This former private recreational land could yield almost 200 affordable dwellings in a mixture of unit types and tenures. The council is working in partnership with Genesis Housing Group and English Partnerships to deliver affordable homes on this site, some designated for key workers and others for rent.

Six Hills Cottages. This small site could yield seven affordable dwellings in the town centre

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Section 106 Affordable Housing Sites Allocated in the Local Plan (including an indication of housing commitments from the planning team)

(See the Glossary for an explanation of 'Section 106')

Site Name	Number of Units
Pond Close	7
Ferrier Road	10
Shephall View	7
Fairview Road Allotments	15
Walkern Road Allotments	14
Nokeside	10
Vincent Court	10

Windfall Affordable Housing Sites

(See Glossary for an explanation of a 'windfall site')

Site Name	Number of Units
Water Tower, Vardon Road	51
Austen Paths (see above)	24

SCHEDULE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

Site	Units	SBC Site	EP Site	Section 106
2002/03				
Acquisition and Works	10			
Coreys Mill	5			x
2003/2004				
<i>Homebuy</i>	2			
2004/05				
Round Diamond	18			x
Ross Court	13	x		
<i>Homebuy</i>	2			
Key Worker	26			
Knebworth Lane	2			x
2005/06				
Brittain Way	60	x		
Oxleys Road	20		x	
Six Hills Cottages	3		x	
Larkinson	15			x
Hertford Road	9			x
2006/07				
ManuLife	69		x	
Ridgemoor Park	35	x		
Austen Paths	24	x		
Fairview Road	199		x	
Pond Close	5			x
Walkern Road	14	x		
2007/08				
Stevenage West	50 (est)			x
Nokeside	10	x		

APPENDIX SIX:

Current Supported Housing Provision

Client Group	Scheme	Units/Bedspaces
Mental Health	Higgins Walk	8
	Austen Paths/Bedwell Crescent	18
	Guildford Close	4
	Turning Point	12
		Total 42
Learning Disability	Manor View	8
	Cotter House	6
	Columbus Close	14
		Total 28
Domestic Violence	C/O Women's Aid	9
		Total 9
Young People	Hutton House	12
	Ripon Road	12
	Marymead	11
		Total 35
Ex-Offenders	NACRO	4
		Total 4
Single Homeless	Stevenage Haven	18
		Total 18

APPENDIX SEVEN:

Information about our performance

The information below shows our past and current performance on the range of housing best value performance indicators and compares our performance against top performing Councils and local and regional averages. Comparisons are made with 2002/03 outcomes (the last available data) except for BVPI's 74 and 75 that were last reported in 2000/2001.

BVPI 62

The proportion of unfit private sector dwelling made fit or demolished as a result of action by the local authority.

Actual 2001/2002	Actual 2002/2003	Actual 2003/2004	Target 2004/2005
11.9%	4.4%	5%	4.5%
Top performing Councils	South East of England Average		District Council Average
4.5%	3.1%		3%

BVPI 63

The average SAP rating of local authority dwellings.

Actual 2001/2002	Actual 2002/2003	Actual 2003/2004	Target 2004/2005
62.65	63.4	64.7	66.5
Top performing Councils	South East of England Average		District Council Average
62	60.3		58.5

BVPI 64

The proportion of private sector dwellings that are returned into occupation or demolished as a direct result of action by the local authority.

Actual 2001/2002	Actual 2002/2003	Actual 2003/2004	Target 2004/2005
21.4%	6%	11%	12%
Top performing Councils	South East of England Average		District Council Average
3.9%	1.8%		1.5%

BVPI 66a

Local authority rent and arrears: the proportion of rent collected.

Actual 2001/2002	Actual 2002/2003	Actual 2003/2004	Target 2004/2005
97.55%	98.18%	98.45%	98.7%
Top performing Councils	South East of England Average		District Council Average
98.3%	97.6%		97.6%

BVPI 74

Satisfaction of Council tenants with the overall service provided by their landlord, with results broken down into BME and non BME tenants from 2003/04 (three yearly survey)

Actual 2001/2002	Actual 2002/2003	Actual 2003/2004	Target 2006/2007
Not required	Not required	Non BME 74% BME 28%	86% overall

Top performing Councils 2000/01	South East of England Average 2000/01	District Council Average 2000/01
83%	79.2%	80.6%

BVPI 75

Satisfaction of tenants of council housing with opportunities for participation in management and decision making in relation to housing services provided by their landlord, with results broken down into BME and non BME tenants (three yearly survey)

Actual 2001/2002	Actual 2002/2003	Actual 2003/2004	Target 2006/2007
Not required	Not required	56%	86%
Top performing Councils 2000/01	South East of England Average 2000/01	District Council Average 2000/01	
67%	66.5%	62.3%	

BVPI 164

Does the Authority follow the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice in Rented Housing and follow the good practice standards for social landlords on tackling harassment included in the Code of Practice for Social landlords: Tackling Racial Harassment.

Actual 2001/2002	Actual 2002/2003	Actual 2003/2004	Target 2004/2005
Yes	No	No	Yes
Top performing Councils	South East of England Average	District Council Average	
Yes	62% Yes	47% Yes	

BVPI 183

The average length of stay in weeks in: 1) B & B accommodation and 2) Hostel accommodation, of households which include dependant children or a pregnant women which are homeless and in priority need.

Actual 2001/2002	Actual 2002/2003	Actual 2003/2004	Target 2004/2005
Not applicable	1) 0 2) 5	1) 0 2) 7	1) 0 2) 5
Top performing Councils	South East of England Average	District Council Average	
1) 1 2) 0	1) 7.4 2) 22.2	1) 5.6 2) 12.3	

BVPI 184

a) The proportion of local authority homes that were non-decent at April 1 2003. b) The change in proportion of non-decent homes between April 1 2003 and April 1 2004.

Actual 2001/2002	Actual 2002/2003	Actual 2003/2004	Target 2004/2005
Not applicable	a) 72% b) 6%	a) 66% b) 52%	a) 32% b) 6%
Top performing Councils	South East of England Average	District Council Average	
a) 24.5% b) 18.6%	a) 30% b) 15.3%	a) 34.4% b) 13.9%	

BVPI 185

Percentage of responsive repairs during 2003/2004 for which the authority both made and kept an appointment.

Actual 2001/2002	Actual 2002/2003	Actual 2003/2004	Target 2004/2005
Not applicable	14.25%	71.9%	75%
Top performing Councils	South East of England Average		District Council Average
73%	43.3%		29.6%

APPENDIX EIGHT: CONTACT DETAILS

If you have any queries about specific issues raised in this strategy, please contact the officers listed below:

Valerie Corrigan 01438 242456	Director of Community Services email: valerie.corrigan@stevenage.gov.uk
Debbie Rabôt 01438 242455	Head of Housing email: debbie.rabot@stevenage.gov.uk
Richard Protheroe 01438 242938	Housing Needs and Strategy Manager email: richard.protheroe@stevenage.gov.uk
Mike Bowes 01438 242460	Principal Housing Needs Officer email: mike.bowes@stevenage.gov.uk
Richard Javes 01438 242962	Planning Policy Manager email: richard.javes@stevenage.gov.uk
Jim Archibald 01438 242251	Environmental Health Manager (Residential) email: jim.archibald@stevenage.gov.uk
John Bentley 01438 242315	Head of Community Development email: john.bentley@stevenage.gov.uk
Sally Flint 01438 242191	Community Safety Officer email: sally.flint@stevenage.gov.uk
Jonathan Angell 01438 242828	Estates Manager email: jonathan.angell@stevenage.gov.uk
Jo Barrett 01438 242590	Head of Housing Technical Services e-mail: jo.barrett@stevenage.gov.uk
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Peter Bandy 01438 242288	Head of Planning email: peter.bandy@stevenage.gov.uk
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For general queries contact:

Rosey Notley 01438 242972	Housing Needs Policy Officer email: rosey.notley@stevenage.gov.uk
Richard Field 01438 242497	Housing Policy Officer (<i>Supporting People</i>) email: richard.field@stevenage.gov.uk

The Council has a policy of offering corporate documents in languages other than English. This service will be offered in 6 different languages on a page in the Housing Strategy. Also copies in large print or on audio tape will be offered to readers.