

<b>Action Plan Priority 1      To increase the supply of affordable housing in the district</b>	
<b>Relative importance</b>	The Council views the insufficient supply of affordable housing to rent or buy in the district as the biggest housing challenge it faces, success or failure in this area will have a direct affect on the delivery of all housing objectives. Balancing the Housing Markets is a major component of the CPA process on which the Council will be rated.
<b>Evidence of importance</b> (research, consultation)	<p>1997 Housing Needs Survey – deficit of 100-200 units of affordable rented housing per annum over the subsequent 3 years.</p> <p>Citizens Panel II – 84% of respondents felt that ‘To increase the amount of affordable housing in the district’ was very important or important. Panel members considered what they thought to be the most important housing issues in the district. The lack of affordable housing, mentioned by 47% of panel members, was clearly seen as the most important (and significantly answers to this question were unprompted).</p> <p>The Councils acceptance of 172 homeless households in 2002/03 is an acute symptom of the lack of affordable housing in the district.</p>
<b>Relation to corporate plans</b>	<p><b>Community Plan</b> – the need for affordable housing is a prominent theme mentioned in the ‘safe and caring communities’ and ‘dynamic and sustainable economy’ elements of the plan, the plan highlights the need to reduce homelessness, provide housing for young people, maintain living communities, provide key worker housing and increasing the range of housing that people can afford.</p> <p><b>The Best Value Performance Plan</b> - raises the issues of maximising housing development on brown field sites, maximising the proportion of affordable homes in new housing developments and funding shared ownership.</p> <p><b>The Corporate Plan and Strategic Framework</b> - objective set to secure the provision of a range of housing which meets the needs and aspirations of the whole community and raises the issue of the need for provision for adequate affordable housing in both social and private sectors.</p> <p>The objectives outlined below incorporate the objectives in the Housing Service Plans</p>
<b>Relation to sub regional/regional strategy</b>	The South East Regional Housing Statement gives access to affordable housing as the single most important housing issue in the South East
<b>Relation to national strategy</b>	<p>The objectives below support the national agenda for providing affordable accommodation for Key Workers.</p> <p>The withdrawal of LASHG has had a negative affect on the Council’s ability to enable additional affordable housing through new development, redevelopment/refurbishment or purchase. The Council has responded to the consultation draft of the South East Regional Housing Strategy which sets out the priorities of the Regional Housing Board for housing funding.</p>

**Priority 1 Areas for Action**

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Continue to support housing initiatives with RSLs and other appropriate agencies and maximise the use of section 106 development opportunities	To produce an additional 100 units of affordable housing per annum (this is subject to regional housing board funding and includes both rented and shared ownership units)	Janine Allen	Subject to regional housing board funding  Potential for developer contributions	RSLs Developers Landowners Parish Councils Suitable sites Officer time	In 2002/2003 affordable housing in the district was increased by the development/acquisition of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moat = 23 Shared ownership units</li> <li>• Becket Trust = 2 units local needs rented housing</li> <li>• Rockdale = 10 units of shared ownership for the elderly</li> <li>• WKHA = 8 units shared ownership and 34 units rented</li> </ul> Total additional units = 77  Sold under Right to Buy = 31 Demolished for redevelopment = 43 Staircased to 100% ownership = 21  Net change = reduction 18 units
Continue to enable provision of shared home ownership units with RSL partners	Target to be set when funding from Housing Corporation transitional arrangements DIYSO bid announced	Janine Allen	Subject to housing funding	RSLs GOSE Officer time	DIYSO = 11 units Homebuy = 7 units Starter Homes Initiative = 5 units New build = 8 units New build elderly = 10 units Total = 41 new units 21 units staircased up to 100%  Net change = increase 20 units

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Fund Key Worker Schemes	2003/04 No target can be set for prior to new regional funding regime due in 2004/05	Janine Allen	Subject to regional housing board funding	Officer time	Starter Homes Initiative delivered 5 units shared ownership (as above)  29 units of Starter Homes Initiative not delivered yet as eligible applicants not able to secure suitable properties. Scheme now extended to a Kent-wide basis by ODPM to address this problem. (Nb funding is until 2004)
In light of LASHG changes we are highlighting the problem of affordable housing in the district and maximising resources through the regional funding regime.	Support funding bids from RSLs to regional housing board.  Arrange tour of district for Senior Investment Manager from Housing Corporation	Janine Allen	None	Officer time	The Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attended meeting with ODPM</li> <li>• Attended GOSE forums prior to implementation of the regional housing funding regime</li> <li>• Enabled tour of district by GOSE</li> </ul> July 2003 – responded to the South East Regional Housing Strategy consultation document
Write an empty property strategy	Now under priority area 4	Now under priority area 4	Now under priority area 4	Now under priority area 4	Now under priority area 4

## Priority 2 – To promote balanced and sustainable communities

<p><b>Relative importance</b></p>	<p>The Council is committed to the social inclusion agenda and recognises that not all residents have equal choice in their housing options. The Council understands that the housing needs of the community are diverse and that the existing housing stock does not always provide a housing solution to those needs.</p>
<p><b>Evidence of importance</b> (research, consultation)</p>	<p>Citizens Panel II – 85% of respondents felt that ‘to promote balanced and sustainable communities’ was very important or important.</p> <p>2002 Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Survey completed by the Council – demonstrated difficulties BME groups were experiencing in communicating with the Council (see appendix 3)</p>
<p><b>Relation to corporate plans</b></p>	<p><b>Community Plan</b> – The ‘Sustainable economy’ is one of the six key elements that makes up the community plan, the objectives are closely tied to sustainable housing including the reduction of empty properties, the provision of affordable units, work to increase social inclusion. Sustainability also features strongly in the ‘Caring Communities’ element with the commitment to achieving better support for people who need special help. The ‘Safer Communities’ element underlines the commitment of the council to ensuring the sustainability of communities through reducing crime and the fear of crime.</p> <p><b>Corporate Plan and Strategic Framework</b> – commitment to continuing to encourage participation and improve opportunities for local residents, identify and develop new services to provide support to vulnerable people living in the community</p> <p>The objectives outlined below incorporate the objectives in the Housing Service Plans</p>
<p><b>Relation to regional strategy</b></p>	<p>Linked to the Regional Community Plan</p>
<p><b>Relation to national strategy</b></p>	<p>ODPM targets that 25% of local authorities should have choice based lettings scheme by 2005 and this should reach 100% by 2010</p> <p>The Homes Bill clause 28 states that every allocation scheme must include a statement on the authorities policy on offering choice.</p> <p>The Race Relations Act 2000, which places a new duty on local authorities to promote racial equality.</p>

**Priority 2 Areas for Action**

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Develop more effective liaison with external partners concerning Gypsy and Traveller issues	<p><b>By Dec 2003</b> – outsource to RSLs relevant Traveller sites where appropriate</p> <p><b>By September 2003</b> Negotiate with potential partners to consider the joint funding of an unauthorised encampment officer</p> <p><b>Ongoing</b> Monthly steering group meetings</p>	Gavin Missons	<p>Bid to be made to ODPM for Gypsy site refurbishment grant October 2003 to bring sites up to standard prior to management transfer.</p> <p>Cost implication to be considered for a shared officer in</p>	<p>SDC Multi-Team Working Group</p> <p>North Kent Encampment Response and Unauthorised Encampment Groups</p> <p>North Kent police</p>	<p>April 2003 - established SDC multi team working group</p> <p>North Kent Encampment Response Group established 2003 – signed up to memo of understanding</p> <p>Member of Kent Unauthorised Encampment working group</p> <p>Produced guidance note on unauthorised camping</p> <p>Worked closely with North Kent Police to develop working practices</p>
Extend the current joint assessment referral process to include Housing Register applicants	<p><b>January 2004</b> Liase with WKHA and members of Steering Group to implement the change.</p>	Jane Ellis	None	WKHA Social Services Probation Officer	The Council gained the joint assessment referral steering groups approval for change to the joint referral process.

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
<p>Ensure that Supporting People programme is implemented 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003 and that the appropriate funding is received for supported and floating support schemes.</p>	<p><b>Ongoing</b> Continue to part-fund supporting housing officer at WKHA</p> <p><b>Ongoing</b> Fund RSL's to provide appropriate supported schemes.</p> <p><b>April 2004</b> To achieve more floating support placements, targets to be set for 2004/2005</p> <p><b>April 2004</b> Provide 20 extra placements of temporary accommodation managed by RSLs</p> <p><b>April 2004</b> To assist people through the rent in advance and/or deposit bond scheme</p>	<p>Pat Smith</p>	<p>£8000 per year paid from existing budget</p> <p>Subject to regional housing board funding and supporting people grant for 2003/04</p> <p>Subject to supporting people grant.</p> <p>Subject to regional housing board funding</p> <p>£20,000 per annum from existing revenue budget.</p>		<p>Funded supported officer with Social Services and WKHA</p> <p>Supported WKHA to introduce probationary tenancies</p> <p>Worked with WKHA to provide floating support for homeless people in temporary accommodation.</p>

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
	and achieve a 5% increase in placements subject to budgets. <b>May 2004</b> Apply for further funding from Homeless directorate for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empty Property Officer (6 month contract)</li> <li>• Mediation (6 month contract services)</li> <li>• PSL scheme</li> </ul>		Subject to funding from homeless directorate		
Support and assist the implementation of the Housing Register 'Choice Based Lettings Scheme'	<b>Dec 2003</b> Work with housing partners to achieve objectives <b>Continuing</b> Ensure that the scheme does not prejudice homeless people <b>Dec 2003</b> Targets to be set once choice based lettings has been established	Jane Ellis	Free management of the SDHR by WKHA but potential set up costs for choice based lettings budget to be considered	SDHR	Preliminary meetings held with WKHA to set up the scheme.

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
To develop shadow supporting people strategy for the district		Pat Smith	Pipe line schemes and growth money for existing schemes to be identified from Supporting People Grants 2003/2004		Linked into Kent-wide strategy  Mapped existing schemes  Identified gaps in provision
To improve and promote equality of access to housing services within the district.	<b>2003/2004</b> Completion of sub survey of Travellers and Gypsies as part of the Housing Needs Survey <b>2003/2004</b> Build on consultation with BME groups <b>2003/2004</b> Meet improvements outlined in Best Value action plan	Pat Smith	Cost of Sub Survey to be included in £90,000 budget for the Housing Needs Survey		Results of equalities monitoring analysed and included in the process of investment in housing services  Improved communication with BME service users.
To ensure that the SDHR continues to be administered fairly, effectively and provides a quality service.	Is now incorporated in the objective above concerning the implementation of choice based lettings	Jane Ellis			Nominations to social vacancies carried out in accordance with legislation and SDC policies.

<b>Priority 3 To improve housing conditions</b>	
<b>Relative importance</b>	The link between housing and health is well established and has been a high priority within the Council for several years
<b>Evidence of importance</b> (research, consultation)	<p>Citizens Panel II - 79% of respondents felt that 'to improve the state of repair of properties in the district' was important or very important.</p> <p>The latest Stock Condition Survey 1997 estimated a level of 5.11% of private sector stock unfit for human habitation and unfit dwellings are more prevalent in the private rented sector and where occupants are disabled, elderly and on low incomes. There is an increasing level of disrepair in interwar dwellings.</p> <p>In the district 13% of properties in 1997 have a Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating of less than 30 and 20% of private rented sector dwellings have a SAP rating of less than 10.</p>
<b>Relation to corporate plans</b>	<p><b>Community Plan</b> – The six elements of the Community Plan can all be linked with improving housing conditions. The need to improve housing conditions is linked to creating 'Safer Communities' 'Healthy Environment' and 'Dynamic and Sustainable economy' elements of the plan. Energy efficiency is linked to the 'Green Environment' element.</p> <p><b>Best Value Performance Plan</b> – sets the objectives of undertaking a Stock Condition Survey and improving house condition by offering grants and taking enforcement action.</p> <p><b>Strategic Framework and Corporate plan</b>– sets the objective of promoting energy efficiency through working closely with local agencies</p> <p>The objectives outlined below incorporate the objectives in the Housing Service Plans</p>
<b>Relation to sub regional/regional strategy</b>	<b>The Kent Health and Affordable Warmth Strategy</b> – the Council has adopted the Kent wide strategy
<b>Relation to national strategy</b>	<p><b>Decent Homes Standard</b> – The Council has no stock of its own so is considering the progress of RSLs in reaching the standard. It can also be applied to dwellings that are owner occupied or rented privately and as part of their strategic function local authorities should be assessing the relative condition problems in each tenure, particularly where vulnerable occupiers are in need of support.</p> <p><b>CPA requirements</b> – The Council must have up to date comprehensive Private Sector Stock Condition Survey information including estimates on the cost of private sector repair and energy efficiency levels. Mechanisms should be in place to ensure that information is updated using a range of different information from different departments like planning, building control and the Home Improvement Agency.</p> <p><b>Home and Energy Conservation Act 1995</b> – Sets the target for a 30% reduction in CO2 over 10-15 years and a directive following this piece of legislation set the target of eradicating fuel poverty by 2010.</p> <p><b>Regulatory Reform Order 2002</b> – De-regulation of grant structure promoting other sources of funding via the Council or externally.</p>

**Priority 3 Areas for Action**

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Continue to monitor and review current Private Sector Housing renewal policy	<b>January 2004</b> To review policy and research further options for external funding	James Nicholls	None	Care and Repair team	Completed Private Sector Renewal Policy endorsed by cabinet and published June 2003
Undertake a Stock Condition Survey and analyse results	<b>September 2003</b> Produce a robust specification by liasing with all relevant agencies <b>January 2004</b> Complete tender process and choose consultants <b>Jan 2004 onwards</b> Liase with consultants to ensure specification is adhered to	James Nicholls	Existing budget £20,000 unlikely to be sufficient, amount of shortfall to be identified and funding requested	Housing Policy Team, Planning, Private Sector Housing (energy conservation) WKHA, Moat	Steering group formed in June 2003 with representation from relevant departments.  Specification draft is being prepared

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Continue to develop Kent Health and Affordable Warmth Strategy	<b>2003/2004</b> To develop target for fuel poverty from the results of the Housing Needs Survey and Stock Condition Survey	Louise Shrubsole	Energy conservation revenue budget	Kent Energy Centre	Liaison with Kent Energy Centre to identify fuel poverty issues across the district.  Identified need to link to the grant process.
Continue to fund and support grants through the Care and Repair scheme.	Link level of grants generated by Care and Repair to grants budget.	James Nicholls	Grants budget 2003/04	Care and Repair team	Care and Repair subject to Best Value Review in 2002  Provided funding and support grants for the Care and repair team in 2002/2003

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Produce a Local Policy outlining alternative methods to fund Care and Repair discretionary work	<p><b>Ongoing</b> Continue to attend Kent Housing Technical Working Group</p> <p><b>Ongoing</b> Work with Moat Care and Repair and other external partners to produce a Grant Policy document providing alternate methods to fund works</p>	James Nicholls	None	Kent Housing Technical Working Group  Lenders	<p>Attended Kent Housing Technical Working Group</p> <p>Negotiated with lenders to identify and establish a suitable financial product</p>
Ensure that in the future the Private Sector grant budget accurately reflects the need across the district	<p><b>September 2003</b> Set an appropriate grants budget for 2004/05</p>	James Nicholls/Pat Smith	Current budget for all grants in 2003/2004 set at £600,000 budget for 2004/05 set at £300,000 with a shortfall likely	Officer time	Grants budget for 2003/2004 was set at £300,000. The budget was reset at £600,000 to meet ongoing identified need.
Continue to fund RSLs to provide aids	<p><b>2003/04</b> Identify an</p>	James Nicholls	Attended Kent Housing	RSLs	Changes to LASHG meant that grants for aids and adaptations to

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
and adaptations	annual budget of at least £300,000 for aids and adaptations		Technical Working		RSLs were cancelled. Additional budget of £300,000 was allocated to meet this duty.
To produce an effective Houses of Multiple Occupation programme	<p><b>Sept 2003</b> Set up a robust data base in conjunction with UNIFORM</p> <p><b>Sept 2003</b> Produce a timetable for a risk assessment</p> <p><b>Sept 2003</b> Set up a rolling programme for assessments</p> <p><b>Dec 2003</b> Set up a local policy and standards document</p> <p><b>Dec 2003</b> Set up a local policy and standards document</p>	Geoff Cackett	Adaptations to existing database no cost	Officer time	Officers have checked existing database of HMO's to ensure that information to be transferred is robust; some inspection work has already been completed.

<b>Priority 4 - To address identified homelessness issues</b>	
<b>Relative importance</b>	Homelessness is the acute symptom of the lack of affordable housing in the District (Priority 1) The experience of homelessness impacts upon health, education and social well being.
<b>Evidence of importance</b> (research, consultation)	<p>Citizens Panel II – 79% of respondents felt that ‘to tackle homelessness’ was important or very important.</p> <p>Review of services in the Homelessness Review revealed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large numbers of households applying to the Council as homeless (source P1E).</li> <li>• Increased numbers of households being accepted as being in priority need and unintentionally homeless. (source P1E).</li> <li>• High numbers of housing advice interviews completed (housing advice database/Shelter &amp; CAB performance indicators).</li> </ul> <p>Single homeless person survey completed 2001 underlines need for provision for homeless</p>
<b>Relation to corporate plans</b>	<p><b>Community Plan</b> - Safe Communities element “Reduce the number of crimes and increase the number of residents who feel safe” – Action 2 Alleviate Homelessness. Caring Communities element ‘Increase opportunities for young people – Action 4 Provide housing for 16 – 25 year olds with floating support.</p> <p><b>Best Value Performance Plan</b> – Reducing the number of people living in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation is an issue for 2002/03 mentioned in the plan.</p> <p><b>Strategic Framework</b> – ‘Green and Healthy Environment’ -Issue 6 Housing the homeless</p> <p>The objectives outlined below incorporate the objectives in the Housing Service Plans</p>
<b>Relation to regional strategy</b>	South East Regional Housing Strategy/Key theme 4/Homelessness and supported housing.
<b>Relation to national strategy</b>	<p>The Housing Act 1996 as amended by The Homeless Act 2002.</p> <p>ODPM Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities July 2002.</p> <p>ODPM paper “Sustainable Communities for the Future” Feb 02</p> <p>ODPM consultation paper “Improving standards of accommodation for homeless households placed in temporary accommodation”</p> <p>DTLR report “More than a roof”</p> <p>Homelessness Directorate guidance</p>

**Priority 4 Areas for Action**

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Assess homeless applications within 33 working days	<b>2003/2004</b> Achieving an average of 17 days to assess homeless applications	Jane Ellis		Social Housing Team, Social Services, Health Services, Private Landlords and RSLs	88% of decisions notified to applicants within 33 days of application
Be more proactive to avoid homelessness	<b>2003/2004</b> Increase advice enquiries by 5% <b>2003/2004</b> Reduce homeless applications by 5%	Jane Ellis	£30,000 grant to Shelter (Revenue)  *£138,500 to CAB (Revenue) * including services other than housing advice  To be identified	Social Housing Team, Shelter, CAB     Best Value review identified need for additional officer to deliver service improvements	Quarterly performance management information produced by CAB and Shelter during 2002/2003.

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation by April 2004	<p><b>By April 2004</b> To achieve a target of nil days for families after a six week occupation period</p>	Jane Ellis		Housing Teams, Empty Property Officer, RSLs, Private Landlords, SDHR	Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy completed in 2003  Best Value Review of Homelessness completed in 2003
	<p><b>2003/2004</b> Empty Property Officer to develop a database of empty properties and develop an Empty Property Strategy</p> <p>By September 2003 Launch Granting Homes scheme subject to budget provision.</p>	Geoff Cackett	Priority Needs Order funding £22,000 (revenue)	Officer time	April 2003 – Empty Property Officer employed and is developing database and strategy.
		Geoff Cackett	£100,000 to be identified in future budgets for 2004/2005	Private sector grants officer time	Private Landlords Forums held throughout 2003 in partnership with the Southern Private Landlords Association (SPLA) to establish effective liaison and communication with private landlords.
To achieve key areas as set out in homelessness strategy	See Homelessness Strategy action plans	Jane Ellis Pat Smith	See Homelessness Strategy action plans	See Homelessness Strategy action plans	Homelessness Review and Homelessness Strategy completed in 2003

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Strategically plan advice services and address gaps in provision through the Community Legal Service Partnership (CSLP)	To ensure all residents in the area covered by the CLSP have equal access to quality legal advice services.	Pat Smith	CLSP working group	None	Attended CLSP launch and meetings Contributed to the CLSP directory of services
Increase the availability of temporary accommodation for homeless households particularly in the private sector	This objective has been incorporated into the Homelessness Strategy objective 1	Jane Ellis Pat Smith	See Homelessness Strategy Action Plans	See Homelessness Strategy Action Plans	Successfully assisted 21 households into private rented accommodation through the Private Sector Lettings scheme.
Continue to financially support and monitor the provision of good quality, independent and SDC housing advice	This objective has been incorporated into the Homelessness Strategy objective 3	Jane Ellis Pat Smith	See Homelessness Strategy Action Plans	See Homelessness Strategy Action Plans	Continued to provide funding to Shelter and CAB for advice services and analyse quarterly performance monitoring.  Continued to work with CSLP  Quarterly liaison meetings have taken place with Shelter and CAB

<b>Priority 5 To develop the Council’s strategic role for housing</b>	
<b>Relative importance</b>	The Council welcomes the Government’s national housing policy agenda of local authorities having a strengthened strategic role in meeting needs across all types of housing. The Council continues to strive to strengthen the strategic role of the housing department both internally and externally to the organisation.
<b>Evidence of importance</b> (research, consultation)	Citizens Panel II – 62% of respondents felt that ‘raising the importance of housing as a local issue’ was important or very important.  Best Value Review Team identified that
<b>Relation to corporate plans</b>	<b>Community Plan</b> – Housing Issues are integral to each of the themes in the community plan  <b>Best Value Performance Plan</b> – Undertaking a Stock Condition and Housing Needs Survey to strengthen the Council’s strategic role is mentioned as an issue under ‘Safe and Caring Communities’  <b>Corporate Plan</b> – In the Corporate Plan the implementation of the Housing Strategy is specifically mentioned in connection with the sustainable economy element. Undertaking a Housing Needs and Stock Condition Survey are also set as objectives  The objectives outlined below incorporate the objectives in the Housing Service Plans
<b>Relation to sub regional/regional strategy</b>	GOSE require document to assess performance
<b>Relation to national strategy</b>	Proposal in Housing Bill to make Housing Strategy documents a statutory duty for local authorities

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Raise the profile corporately and district-wide of the Council's energy conservation initiatives.	<b>2003/04</b> Advertise locally and promote in the Housing Strategy document	Louise Shrubsole	Cost to be identified energy conservation revenue budget already in place	Kent Energy Centre	An energy conservation information afternoon took place in June 03 which was organised in conjunction with the Kent Energy Centre. The event was attended by officers, members and external organisations including house builders and housing associations.
Undertake a Housing Needs Survey	<b>Monthly</b> To liase with consultants to ensure specification is adhered to  <b>March 2004</b> Analyse results and add to Housing Strategy	Housing Initiatives Officer (vacant post, work being covered in interim by Janine Allen)	Within identified budget	Housing Needs Survey steering group staff resource	The specification for the Housing Needs Survey has been completed. The tender process for the survey is complete and the contractor appointed. An information afternoon was organised for officers in June 2003 to publicise the research and obtain funding from private developers. Officers and members, housing agents and developers attended .
Publish an Empty Property Strategy	<b>Dec 2003</b> Complete, consult and get approval of Empty Property Strategy.	Geoff Cackett	Homelessness Directorate Funding of £22,000	Housing Associations Empty Homes Agency	Employment of Empty Property Officer – April 2003  Work commenced on empty property database.
Undertake a Stock Condition Survey	Incorporated into priority area 3	James Nicholls			Now incorporated into objectives in priority area 3

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Finance	Human /other	
Continue to effectively liase with Planning (Strategic Services)	<p><b>Monthly</b> Attend monthly planning and housing officer group meeting</p> <p><b>During 2003</b> Contribute towards the new Local Development Document</p> <p><b>2003/04</b> Identify the need and address this in the Housing Strategy and Local Development documents.</p>	Janine Allen	<p>None</p> <p>None</p> <p>Subject to regional board funding</p>	Planning team	<p>In 2003 the planning and housing officer group has met regularly.</p> <p>The planning and housing officers have worked closely on the preparation of the Housing Needs Survey Specification and award of contract. The two teams worked together on an information afternoon for stakeholders on the housing research being undertaken.</p>
Continue to develop the Housing Strategy document to achieve Fit for Purpose standard	Fit for purpose standard 2004	Janine Allen	Printing and publicity budget	Stakeholders identified in Strategy document	Achieved a performance rating of 'above average' for the strategy in 2002.

<b>Priority 6 To encourage the development of sustainable rural areas</b>	
<b>Relative importance</b>	The Council recognises that in the rural villages and settlements in the district there are specific housing challenges that merit separate consideration in the Strategy. There is a need to balance the economic, social and environmental sustainability of rural areas.
<b>Evidence of importance</b> (research, consultation)	<p>Citizens Panel II - 76% of respondents' felt that to 'Address housing problems in rural areas' was very important or important.</p> <p>Focus groups were held at the 2002 Housing Forum which revealed significant concerns over affordable housing and the need for information exchange, networking and consultation with rural communities. The Rural Housing Working Group has carried out two rural housing forums in 2002 and 2003 which were well attended and again emphasised the importance of specific consideration of rural areas within the Housing Strategy.</p>
<b>Relation to corporate plans</b>	<p><b>Community Plan</b> – Under the 'Sustainable Economy' element our targets are to ' Improve the viability of our towns, villages and rural communities'</p> <p>The objectives outlined below incorporate the objectives in the Housing Service Plans</p>
<b>Relation to sub regional/regional strategy</b>	Housing Corporation South East Regional Investment Strategy. Regional Housing Strategy
<b>Relation to national strategy</b>	Sustainable Communities Plan

**Priority 6 Areas for Action**

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objective	Responsible Officer	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Financial	Human/other	
Continue to work to reflect rural housing issues in the Housing Strategy and other Council policies and strategies including the Local Development Framework	<b>Ongoing</b> Increased awareness of rural housing issues within the organisation	Janine Allen		Rural Housing Working Group RSLs KCC Rural Housing Enabler Parish Councils Landowners Housing Corporation	Rural housing forums held in 2002 in Farningham and 2003 in Eynsford.
To continue to promote and enable local needs Rural Housing Schemes	<b>Continuing</b> Continue to run working group <b>2003/2004</b> Support funding bids for future schemes <b>2003/2004</b> Ensure that Local Develop Document adequately address Rural Housing issues	Janine Allen		Rural Housing Working Group RSLs KCC Rural Housing Enabler Parish Councils Landowners Housing Corporation	Rural Housing Working Group met regularly in 2003

<b>Priority 7 To contribute to the Council’s crime reduction programme</b>	
<b>Relative importance</b>	<p>Good housing policy can have a dramatic effect on reducing burglary from homes, sheds and garages, vehicle crime, anti-social behaviour, bogus callers, domestic violence and crimes against minority groups including racial incidents.</p> <p>These themes are addressed by the Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership’s Strategy and Action Plan in which housing plays a vital role.</p>
<b>Evidence of importance</b> (research, consultation)	<p>Citizens Panel I (Nov 2002) - concerns about the crime rate and lack of policing were rated as the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> highest in the 10 most quoted problems facing the area.</p> <p>Citizens Panel II (Feb 2003) - 95% of respondents felt that ‘to work in partnership on crime reduction initiative related to housing’ was very important or important. Community planning themes including safe communities were explored, each of the targets in the Community Plan was given a very high importance by the panel with crime reduction and increasing the number of residents who feel safe as the most important target.</p> <p>An audit of crime across the District carried out in 2001 highlighted the key issues that had to be included in the Community Safety Strategy and Action Plan. Area specific consultations have been undertaken with over 800 people taking part through Planning for Real in Swanley and Sevenoaks. An audit of Domestic Violence needs is currently being undertaken.</p> <p>The anti social behaviour task group which includes housing representatives last year dealt with 50 cases and saw an improvement in 41 of these cases.</p>
<b>Relation to Corporate Plans</b>	<p><b>Community Plan and Corporate Plan</b> – The Council’s long term ambition is to be recognised as a district with safe and caring communities. This is clearly set out in both the community and corporate plans which both link to the similar aims in the countywide vision for Kent.</p> <p><b>Young People’s Action Plan</b> – The plan identifies where improved services for young people can assist in them</p>
<b>Relation to National Strategies</b>	<p>The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on local authorities and the Police to work in partnership with other agencies to reduce crime. The Sevenoaks District Community partnership was set up in response.</p>

**Priority 7 Areas for Action**

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Leading	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Financial	Human/other	
Reduce burglary of dwellings	<p>3 year programme 2002-2005 Reduce by 10%</p> <p><b>Ongoing</b> Monitor levels of burglary across the district, target and process initiatives to reduce and detect burglary</p> <p><b>Dec annually</b> Support neighbourhood watch initiatives through the voluntary sector grants scheme.</p> <p><b>Quarterly</b> Report to executive sub-group</p>	Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership (SDCSP)	Existing partners budgets and/or Home Office funding	Partnership project	<p>In addition to Police led operations, initiatives have included working with Trading Standards, Age Concern and the media regarding Burglary Artifice (Bogus Callers).</p> <p>Neighbourhood Watch continues to develop across the district, and residents are encouraged to be eyes and ears in their neighbourhoods.</p>

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Leading	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Financial	Human/other	
Involve local people in community safety issues	<p><b>December 2002</b> Neighbourhood focus group constituted</p> <p><b>Ongoing</b> Local solutions implemented</p>	SDCSP	Existing partners budgets and/or Home Office funding	Partnership project	A Planning for Real exercises in two social housing areas of Sevenoaks has been carried out, and attracted £10,000 of Home Office funding for Community Safety improvements.
Subject all re-designed and new housing developments to Secured by Design scrutiny	<p><b>December 2002</b> Training provided for planning officers</p> <p><b>December 2002</b> Consultation arrangements in place.</p>	SDCSP	Existing partners budgets and/or Home Office funding	Partnership project	Police-led training for SDC staff is planned for September to enable a checklist to be introduced to enable housing developments to be considered
Tackle anti-social behaviour through the ASB Task Group	<p><b>Monthly</b> Implement action within the ASB framework to address individual cases of anti-social behaviour, monitor outcomes, prioritise cases according to level and impact of</p>	SDCSP	Existing partners budgets and/or Home Office funding	Partnership project	Multi-agency group has seen an improvement in the behaviour of 41 individuals discussed during the year. 9 warning letters have recently been issued, 4 ASBOs are in place and a number of ABAs have been signed.

Objective 2003/2004	Targets to meet objectives	Leading	Resource Implications		Performance 2002/2003
			Financial	Human/other	
	each case <b>Quarterly</b> Measurable improvements in behaviour monitored and reported to Partnership				
Work to map Domestic Violence services available across district (including victims and offenders), and ensure advice and publicity is made available	<b>September 2002</b> Current domestic violence forum boundaries reviewed  <b>December 2002</b> Ongoing support to the Forum established.  <b>Ongoing</b> Receive regular reports from domestic violence forums to ensure and determine further support by Partnership agencies.	SDCSP	Existing partners budgets and/or Home Office funding	Partnership project	A report on services available to victims will be available in Autumn 2003. Funding has purchased cameras for Police to capture evidence of Domestic Violence.

## **Appendix 2 – Existing Services to meet the priorities for action**

### 2.1 To provide additional affordable housing in the district

The Council does not directly provide permanent affordable accommodation but gives advice and assistance to help people access a permanent home, supports bids for funding for the provision of affordable housing and has an enabling role in the provision of new affordable housing through planning gain. In addition to providing opportunities for affordable housing the Council recognises that some people need support services to enable them to access and maintain their accommodation. These services are included in section 2.2 below.

#### **Enabling Role**

Enabling the provision of additional affordable housing to rent or buy has long been central to the Council's strategic housing role. Within the Sevenoaks District this is mainly achieved through our partnership working with RSLs. Up to April 2003 under the previous financial regime the Council's capital programme priorities were set by considering the housing needs in the district against the existing supply of affordable housing, in particular the need for family housing at affordable rents and for key worker housing. When the results of the needs survey and other research is available the priorities will be re-evaluated for future funding bids. There are several methods used to provide additional affordable housing in the district.

- Repurchasing former social housing (bought under the Right to Buy) is one way of increasing the supply of social housing. However, the continued rising house prices in the district coupled with grant rate constraints is resulting in fewer properties being repurchased, in particular in Sevenoaks town and the rural areas.
- New build of affordable housing is restricted in the district due to the availability of sites as detailed in Chapter 2. However the Council is committed to enable RSLs to take full advantage of opportunities that arise to provide new build housing, including the rebuilding of areas of social housing where poor stock conditions occur. The rebuilding presents the opportunity not only to improve housing conditions and design-in energy efficiency measures and make properties more accessible for people with disabilities but also to increase density and hence provide additional units. A recent example of rebuilding is the Energy House built by WKHA in Kemsing which is designed to high standards of energy efficiency and to be occupied by a person who uses a wheelchair.
- Shared home ownership schemes DIYSO, Homebuy and the Starter Homes Initiative as detailed below enable people to buy properties on the open market and become shared owners, hence providing additional affordable housing units.
- Conversion or change of use of existing properties can provide additional units of accommodation, or can be used to meet specific types of housing need. Where the opportunities arise the Council would support these in principle, as this would be in line with current planning guidance on re-using buildings. However, properties can be expensive to convert, particularly in Conservation Areas where high quality design

standards are required, and so the grant restrictions may mean these schemes are not viable for affordable housing. This can include bringing empty properties, whether residential or not, back into use for accommodation.

### **Access to affordable housing**

- The majority of affordable housing including Low Cost Home Ownership is accessed in the Sevenoaks district through the Sevenoaks District Housing Register (SDHR). The Council works in close partnership with WKHA and the administration of the SDHR is regulated by a Service Level Agreement. All the members of the SDHR maintain their individual policies for allocation of vacancies. In response to the changes in legislation relating to allocations, applicants can now register on the SDHR from the age of 16 and policies involving choice based lettings are being investigated.
- To assist with managing homelessness in the district the Council are reviewing the target for allocations through the register to homeless households. The Council had wished to raise the proportion from 35% to 40% but this is reliant on many factors including the implementation of choice based lettings and the provision of housing through pipeline schemes which is reliant on funding from the regional housing board.
- There are also some Housing Associations and Almshouses who hold their own waiting lists for their properties in the district. The number of these properties is small and they are usually for older people. Examples include Sevenoaks Almshouses, the Abbeyfield Societies, and Hanover Housing Association.
- Permanent re-housing can also be provided through the Headway scheme managed by John Grooms Housing Association to provide 7 flats with a live in project manager for people with head injuries. This scheme is joint funded with TWBC and T&MBC.
- There are several different types of Low Cost Home Ownership available to enable people to buy a share in a property:-
- Do It Yourself Shared Ownership (DIYSO) is aimed at first time buyers in the district. The Council provided the funding to Moat Home Ownership (MHO) to enable them to offer this scheme. The person bought a share (from 25%) in a property on the open market and rent is payable on the remaining share owned by MHO. The person can in future buy more shares in the property up to 100% ownership if they wish, called 'staircasing up'. This scheme has been very successful in the district and the Council has continued to support this for as long as funding and Government legislation allowed. In 2002/03 we designated two places on the DIYSO scheme tailored to meet the needs of people with Learning Difficulties but unfortunately we were unable to identify suitable applicants in time. The council remains committed to support home ownership options for people with disabilities. A bid has been made by MHO for transitional funding to continue DIYSO in 2003/04.
- Homebuy is a different form of shared ownership to DIYSO, where the applicant buys 75% of the property but does not pay rent or interest on the 25% owned by MHO as this is an equity loan scheme. When the person wants to sell or staircase up MHO recoups the 25% loaned plus any growth in its share. The property bought need not be located in the district, and is funded by the Housing Corporation. In 2002/03 funding was available to enable 7 purchases to proceed.

- The Starter Homes Initiative is a scheme where a number of people working as teachers or health workers in the district can buy a home, based on the DIYSO model. The Council worked in partnership with MHO to bid for this funding from the Housing Corporation, and achieved £1.7 million over the 3 years of the scheme for Sevenoaks to enable 34 key worker households to buy in this way.
- New build shared ownership. This is where properties are built specifically for sale on a shared ownership basis. MHO and WKHA are in the process of developing some properties in the district for shared ownership sale. Some of these are aimed at specific groups of key workers and others are for applicants from the waiting list.
- Some shared ownership schemes are available for older people such as those provided by Rockdale Housing Association and Moat. These provide additional services to the owners such as community alarms, residents lounge, and warden services. Rockdale is completed the second phase of a scheme in Sevenoaks town centre last year.
- It is possible for people who are not first time buyers to access shared home ownership through the re-sales system. When an existing shared owner wishes to move the property is marketed to other people waiting to buy on a shared ownership basis.
- There are a small number of shared ownership properties on rural exception site developments in the district, and any vacancies arising are made available to people with a local connection to the relevant parish.

#### **Access to the private rented sector**

Due to the strong housing market in the Sevenoaks District, the Council recognises that it is often difficult to find accommodation when someone is on a low income or receiving housing benefit and cannot provide private landlords with rent in advance or a deposit.

- The Council has developed a Private Sector Lettings Scheme to help people local to the Sevenoaks District secure privately rented accommodation by providing financial assistance with rent in advance and/or a deposit bond. To qualify for the scheme, applicants need to have a local connection with the Sevenoaks District, currently be without accommodation or have to leave their existing home and be in receipt of a low income or welfare benefits. The scheme is also offered to those to whom the council has no statutory responsibility to provide with temporary accommodation such as intentionally homeless people. This is an effective means of ensuring that families and vulnerable people can still access housing even if the council's statutory duty towards them is solely to provide advice and assistance. The Social Housing department and the Housing benefit department have worked closely together to ensure the success of this scheme.
- The Council is keen to work with landlords who own properties in the district to increase the accessibility of this sector of housing and is holding regular forums for landlords in partnership with the Southern Private Landlords Association.

### **Key workers**

- The Council recognises that there are a number of employees who provide services to the district that are vital to the health and safety, social cohesion and/or economic viability of the district. Many of these workers, whether in the public sector or employed by private businesses have relatively low incomes compared to housing costs and are finding it increasingly difficult to access affordable housing in the district to rent or buy.
- Some work has already been carried out with health service providers and Kent County Council Education department in relation to the Starter Homes Initiative bid to consider which employees they would class as key workers. The Council has consulted the Citizens Panel and held focus groups at the Housing Forum around the definition of key workers which has shown some support for a wider definition. The Housing Needs Survey results will also provide relevant information on incomes and employment which will assist us in defining the workers we need to retain or attract into the area.

## 2.2 To promote balanced and sustainable communities

### **Special needs groups**

The Council has a responsibility to assist KCC's Social Services department to enable people with special needs to live in the community of their choice. In general, there is a need for additional supported housing to meet the varying needs of the groups identified. The views of KCC Social Services department regarding housing and care for people with special needs are set out below:

- KCC Social Services Department would support the provision of move-on accommodation for people with learning disabilities who wish to move from intensive supported schemes to a more independent living type of accommodation.
- A Mental Health and Housing Strategy was considered by the Thames Gateway Health Trust area in June 1999. A similar strategy is being drafted for the Invicta area. The strategy seeks to:
  - Encourage the development of warden supported housing for people with mental health problems
  - Encourage tenant participation and consultation within all types of supported housing for people with mental health problems
  - Encourage the provision of appropriate housing for people with mental health problems
  - Achieve supported lodgings for people with mental health problems
  - Enhance floating support/supportive housing officer schemes within the Sevenoaks District Council area
  - Ensure that there is the provision of adequate services to support people with mental health problems throughout the District

These targets are included in the Kent Wide Supporting People Strategy and will be identified in the action plan for 2003/2004 and beyond.

- There is a need for provision of a consistent programme of Lifetime Homes and grants for adaptations to existing dwellings

- There is a need for provision of self-contained accommodation with appropriate support for young people leaving care

### **Supporting People**

- Sevenoaks District Council and Kent County Council worked in partnership with other Kent local authorities, RSLs and other agencies to deliver the Supporting People programme which went live on the 1st April 2003.
- Supporting People offers vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life by providing positive services, which enable them to have greater independence and control in making choices within their lives. It promotes housing related support services which are both cost-effective and planned using a co-ordinated approach.
- A Commissioning Forum for Kent was set up initially to be the decision and policy making body managing the budget for all supported schemes from 2003. The Commissioning Forum has now split into two distinct bodies which are;
  - The Core Strategy Development Group (the policy and decision making body)
  - The Commissioning Body (monitoring the Supporting People budget and allocating resources)

Representatives from 12 Kent local authorities, Medway Unitary authority, Social Services, Probation and Health are represented on the two bodies by either a councillor or officer.

- Prior to 2003 funding had been obtained to provide a shadow implementation team to map existing provision, identify gaps in local services, consider improvements to existing services, undertake tendering, contracting payments, audit and review schemes, and ensure that housing benefit includes the support costs for the individual claimants. Locality Officers were appointed to progress this work and produce local strategies to feed into the Kent wide strategy forming the basis (plus interim contracts) to negotiate with the Housing Corporation to identify the ring-fenced budget from 2003 (plus inflation increases). Research and review work will continue in 2003/2004.

### **Services provided and Investment priorities for special needs groups**

- The Care and Repair Scheme was established in 1990. The scheme works closely with KCC Social Services, Age Concern and Citizens Advice Bureaux to provide advice, practical and technical assistance to elderly or disabled people who may need to carry out essential repairs or improvements to their homes. The aim is to enable them to continue to live in their homes in greater comfort and security. The scheme was re-tendered in 2001 and a new contract was offered to Moat Care and Repair. In line with DTLR requirements the Council has set Local Performance Indicators for the scheme.

The scheme is actively involved in promoting the Council's energy efficiency strategy and works closely with the Council's Energy Conservation Officer and the Energy Action Grants Agency, to whom clients are referred for advice and assistance.

- A 'Handy Person' scheme was introduced as part of the service in April 1997 and continues to be very popular, preventing minor jobs being referred to the main Care and Repair scheme. The type of work undertaken is replacing tap washers, small-scale plumbing, woodwork and other minor jobs. A small fee is charged to those elderly and disabled people not in receipt of a state benefit. This valuable scheme is partly funded from the Council's Hardship fund and other identified budgets.
- The funding of Home Improvement Agencies (such as the Care and Repair scheme) is to be administered by the Supporting People Commissioning Programme from April 2003, with the budget ring-fenced.
- WKHA provides a floating support service for their vulnerable tenants, the team currently receive a Supporting People grant to fund support for 145 tenants and employ an external specialist organisation to provide support to a further 9 people with mental health problems. The service is available to help new vulnerable tenants settle into their home as well as to existing tenants who are struggling with their tenancies. The type of services provided include helping people get furniture, claim benefits and access charitable funds, and assist with general budgeting and life skills. Support groups are run to promote friendships and encourage people to play an active part in their community.
- Jointly funded by SDC, TWBC & TMBC is Moat Supported Housing Services floating support scheme that offers flexible support to vulnerable tenants living in RSL properties. This support includes help with budgeting, form filling and other life skills, with the aim of helping people to maintain their tenancies. Once support is no longer required, support is gradually withdrawn and the tenant remains in the property.
- The Council has a programme of grant funding available for adaptations to enable disabled people to remain in their own homes, through Disabled Facilities Grant.
- Where there is an identified need for new supported accommodation the council aims to make support funding applications to enable RSLs to develop schemes. In particular there is a need for a supported housing scheme for homeless single vulnerable people with mental health problems in the district.
- Several RSLs and private businesses provide sheltered accommodation for older people within the district. Rockdale Housing Association has produced a guide to services for older people (including housing) with the aid of a Good Practice Grant from the Housing Corporation.
- Accommodation suitable for people with physical disabilities is available throughout the district and it is expected that new RSL properties are designed to Lifetime Homes standard and a proportion of at least 10% of larger schemes to wheelchair accessible standards.

**Black and Minority Ethnic**

In 2001 the Council introduced its BME Housing Strategy (Appendix 4) which has since been emulated by other Kent local authorities.

- The Council will be continuing to follow its action plan to identify and address housing issues for BME households in the district. In particular the Council has implemented recording of racial incidents where people approach the social housing team for advice or where households make a homeless application. In addition the Housing Department funded the provision of Language Line to make it easier for people to communicate with the Council.
- Consultation with BME groups was an objective agreed in the BME Strategy. A survey was directed at service users in 2002 and the majority of responses were from those on the SDHR, tenants of local RSL's, and those using the Benefits, Housing Advice and Homelessness services provided by the Council. Respondents represented a wide range of minority ethnic groups from throughout the district including Travellers and Gypsies. There were 21 respondents to the survey from the 120 sent out so the number is not large enough to be truly representative, however the responses pointed to some key areas that the council may need to address as outlined below; (see appendix 3 for more details)
  - Overall satisfaction levels were good however the issue attracting the most comments was communication in relation to accessing services. Many respondents stated that they or a member of their household had difficulties communicating, either not speaking English as their first language or having difficulties with reading and writing. Many suggestions were made for improving communication.

Actions have been taken to improve our understanding and communication with BME groups as outlined below;

- The Council recognises the need to gather further information on BME groups and has ensured that this has been taken into account when developing research. The Housing Needs Survey will include an assessment of the needs of Travellers and Gypsies living in permanent housing and those in permanent residential sites and unauthorised encampments.
- The Council has worked in partnership with TWBC, TMBC and Language Line to provide a joint call handling system to monitor complaints of racial harassment. The call centre went live in April 2003.

Travellers and Gypsies are likely to make up the district's largest ethnic minorities, the vast majority of Traveller and Gypsy communities live within settled housing or permanent or authorised residential sites. There has however been a significant increase in unauthorised encampments in the past year.

- A specialist officer is employed by the Council whose duties include liaison with the travelling community and colleagues at Kent County Council who manage the authorised sites throughout the district.

- The Council is a member of the North Kent Encampment Response Group, the Unauthorised Encampment Working Group and the Technical Support Group these groups are attended by Policy, Local Authorities, Health and Welfare organisations to address problems of communication and to enable efficient effective response to unauthorised encampments at a local and County level.
- Internally the Council has sought to improve communication and ensure that there is a co-coordinated response to unauthorised encampments by setting up a multi-section working group.

The Council has few asylum seekers and refugees living in the district but recognises that this can be very isolating for those that do live in the area,

- The Council is a member of the South East Regional Consortium; and the
- Kent Asylum Seekers Multi-agency Forum.

### **Sustainable Communities**

- The West Kent Mediation service receives grant funding from the Council to help people resolve their differences and improve their quality of life.

#### 2.3 To improve housing conditions

The Council will continue to target those properties identified within the Stock Condition and Energy Efficiency Survey (1997) as being in the greatest need, including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and those properties constructed between 1919 and 1944. The Council will continue to ensure that as far as is reasonably practicable every dwelling within the District is fit for human habitation, maintained in reasonable repair and is suitable for occupation. In addition the Council will give priority to those properties with a SAP rating of less than 30 to incorporate energy efficiency measures.

- Grants for private sector dwellings are prioritised to residents with disabilities, older people, low income households, houses in multiple occupation, unfit properties and properties built between 1919-1944 (see Appendix 5). This is in line with the findings of the Stock Condition Survey.
- The Council has committed substantial Social Housing Grant (SHG) funding to enable RSLs to improve existing homes and increase their energy efficiency characteristics. The Council will also continue to provide funding and support for appropriate major repair and improvement schemes proposed by RSLs. WKHA has set aside £20 million in their business plan over the next 3 years for improvements to their stock.
- A home security package is available to Care and Repair clients who are in receipt of a qualifying benefit. The scheme works closely with a number of external agencies and voluntary bodies, including Kent County Council Social Services, Age Concern, and CABx.
- The Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) initiative was re-launched in Autumn 2001. A specialist officer has been employed to ensure that HMOs reach statutory standards,

including those relating to fire safety. The Council intends to introduce a licensing or registration scheme, subject to further guidance from central Government. Regular meetings are held with specialist officers from other Kent local authorities to discuss issues relating to HMOs and share good practice and procedures.

- Advice is given to tenants, homeowners and landlords regarding home maintenance issues to assist people in looking after their homes. The Council will continue the use of informal action to overcome disrepair and unfitness and will use formal enforcement action where appropriate.
- Full use will be made of the renovation grant budget targeted to those in greatest need.
- The Council has sought to reduce the number of vacant homes in disrepair by appointing an Empty Property Officer on a fixed term contract and through the implementation and development of an empty homes database and strategy.
- The Council has implemented a programmed inspection of mobile home parks to ensure compliance with site license conditions.

### **Energy Efficiency**

The District Council produced its Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Report in December 1996. The terms of HECA require local authorities to plan how to reduce domestic energy consumption by 30% over a 10-year period. The Council works successfully in partnership with a range of agencies to deliver energy efficiency improvements, and in particular with all other Kent local authorities through the Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership (KEEP).

- The Council Energy Strategy (to be revised in 2003/2004) aims to enable significant energy efficiency improvements to be made to all domestic properties in line with HECA requirements.
- Energy awareness training is provided for council staff and the staff of other relevant agencies. The intention of these sessions is to achieve widespread dissemination of energy efficiency advice. The Council's Private Sector Housing Team and a Home Improvement Agency Liaison Officer have been trained to City & Guilds Energy Advice standards, and any new staff will be trained as they join the team. In addition Kent Energy Centre hosted a training session at the Council offices in June 2003 which was well attended by staff, elected members and external agencies.
- KEEP worked in partnership with the Energy Savings Trust and the Creative Environmental Network to open the Kent Energy Centre in 2000. This provides an energy efficiency advice service and residents are encouraged to complete the free Home Energy Survey Checks. The KEC has worked on behalf of KEEP to secure funding from London Electricity to provide 50% grants for residents using the KASH scheme. The KEC has also secured funding through the Energy Savings Trust to promote the KASH scheme. The KEC provides an energy efficiency advice line at local call rates for residents

- The KASH scheme provides residents with the opportunity to access discounted loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, energy efficient mains gas boilers, and full mains gas central heating systems. In addition to the discounts, loft and cavity wall insulation attract substantial grants from London Electricity through their Energy Efficiency Commitment money. This scheme is promoted by Sevenoaks District Council and administered by the KEC.
- The Council works closely with Eaga (Energy Action Grants Agency) and relevant organisations such as Care and Repair to deliver the government's Warm Front scheme. This scheme provides grants for insulation and efficient heating systems to the most vulnerable residents with grants from central government.
- The West Kent Healthy Homes initiative led by Sevenoaks District Council was developed through a partnership between local authorities, RSL's, voluntary groups, private organisations and health. SDC has led this innovative initiative, which provides energy efficient heating systems, insulation and mechanical ventilation units with heat recovery. The scheme integrates the available grants and discounted systems with a zero interest loan fund.
- The Council continues to seek inward investment to maximise the resources available to improve energy efficiency within the housing stock in Sevenoaks.
- The council has worked in partnership with KEE, the KEC, the NEA, Kent Health Authorities, Kent Social Services and the voluntary sector to develop a strategy for eliminating fuel poverty in Kent – the Kent Health and Affordable Warmth Strategy. This strategy is a working document that will be developed and taken forward across the sectors as funding becomes available. Success has already been achieved with funding from npower to provide training and a member of staff to develop a 'Health Through Warmth' programme throughout Kent. Further funding has been received from the Government's 'Invest to Save' programme. The aim is to provide an integrated scheme across all the sectors to give residents benefit advice, energy efficiency advice, and grants for energy efficiency improvements in order to reduce fuel poverty in the district.
- In Sevenoaks district 26.6% of private tenants live in a property with a SAP rating of fewer than 19, and a significant proportion of these tenants are on low incomes. The majority of the population aged over 75 years live in properties with a SAP rating lower than the district average of 43. Where poor energy efficiency, lack of mains gas central heating and low incomes converge there is an increase risk that the household is living in fuel poverty. The high average fuel costs in the following parishes are a particular cause for concern – Cowden, Fawkham, Hever, Shoreham, and Westerham.
- WKHA has already invested heavily in energy efficiency improvements to its stock and have now turned their attention to the potential of new build homes to deliver energy savings and water conservation measures. The Energy House prototype in Kemsing will be monitored closely and it is hoped to replicate the measures in future WKHA new-build homes. The house has won an EcoHomes award, the first to be awarded to a RSL.

## 2.4 To address identified Homelessness issues

### **Advice Services**

The Council is committed to and prides itself in providing a high quality and comprehensive housing advice service. The aim is to be proactive and to prevent homelessness by helping people maximise their occupation rights, by providing advice on how to sustain a tenancy and also to help those who become homeless to access accommodation quickly. Advice is available concerning:

- Tenancy matters and occupation rights
  - Welfare Benefits and debt counseling
  - Mortgage Advice and the Mortgage Rescue scheme
  - Relationship breakdowns
  - Racial or homophobic harassment
  - Domestic Violence
  - Equal Opportunities and Human Rights
  - Mediation and Support
  - Landlord and Tenant issues including illegal eviction
  - Childrens Act and Supporting People initiatives
- A partnership led by the Council together with WKHA and Moat has enabled the enhancement and continued provision of independent Housing Advice within the district by Shelter Kent Housing Aid to people living in the private and social housing sectors. There are two local surgeries located in the north and centre of the district and negotiations are ongoing to extend this to provide a surgery in the south. The council supplements this service by funding three CABx and provides an in-house service as well. Housing Advice Liaison meetings are held quarterly to monitor and coordinate the quality of housing advice services throughout the District and the provision of these independent advice services are administered by service level agreements. The Councils Housing Advice provision therefore aims to make available a seamless well-signposted service which also covers:
    - The Sevenoaks District Housing Register and individual RSL allocation policies
    - Local housing options including how to access private rented accommodation and supported housing schemes
    - Measures to remedy property disrepair
    - Energy efficiency advice to help people keep warm in their homes
  - In order to ensure that the Housing Advice service is accessible and adequately mapped the Community Legal Services Partnership has recently been set up. The partnership includes SDC, TWBC, TMBC, CABx, Shelter, all advice agencies in the three local authority areas, and the Legal Services Commission. The aim is to make advice services accessible to all (including those socially excluded), to cross reference websites and publications, and to create definable standards with Quality Mark accreditation. The advice areas include welfare benefits, housing advice, tenancy advice, information about Safer Communities and Leisure.

**Homelessness services**

The Council fulfils its duty to provide a homelessness service through its Social Housing team in the Housing and Environmental Health Department. This service covers activities relating to the Council's statutory duty to assist people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The objective of this service is to provide a good quality Housing Advice Service to prevent homelessness and illegal eviction and to assist those who become homeless to access housing. This service also covers the assessment and investigation of homeless applications, arranging the placement of homeless applicants into temporary accommodation and working in partnership with the SDHR and private sector to access permanent housing. The Council receives an average of 28 homelessness applications per month and aims to assess these within an average of 17 working days (against the Government's target of 33 working days).

- The Joint Assessment Referral Process is a very good example of effective joint working between the Council, the relevant Social Services teams, Moat Housing Society and WKHA. It is regulated through the Joint Assessment and Referral Agreement (JAR) that is a joint working protocol that all participants have signed. The JAR is a contract between these organisations to provide a coordinated response to the housing and care needs of vulnerable homeless people by streamlining the housing process and ensuring the availability of appropriate care packages. This process has been emulated by several other Kent local authorities and has been presented as a good practice model at the SELSVT benchmarking group. The Council is currently investigating the possibility of creating a further referral process to include the housing register in an effort to support people within their homes and prevent homelessness.
- There are quarterly meetings with all agencies involved to review the JAR process and to discuss the wider issues surrounding Supporting People and the housing of vulnerable clients. The Council monitors the process and is ensuring that recipients take an active role. The inclusion of the Probation Service and Health Authority within this process is under discussion as a response to the new duties placed on housing authorities under the Homelessness Act 2002.

**Temporary Accommodation**

- The Council has long recognised that the use of bed and breakfast accommodation as temporary accommodation is the least suitable for homeless people, particularly for families and those who need support. Research has proven direct links between the long-term use of Bed & Breakfast and social exclusion and child poverty as well as having detrimental affects on education and health. The Council has been working for several years to reduce its use and is committed to meeting the government's target of eliminating the use of Bed & Breakfast for families and pregnant women by 2004.
- Where bed and breakfast accommodation is used premises are visited and inspected on a regular basis by the appropriate Environmental Health departments, fire safety officers, and the council's social housing and housing benefit staff to ensure the accommodation provided is to an acceptable standard.

The table below shows the number in bed and breakfast accommodation.

	June 30th	September 30th	December 31st	March 31 <sup>st</sup>
2002/03	29	42	30	43
2001/02	32	41	28	29
2000/01	16	27	20	29

**Table 10 - Numbers in Bed and Breakfast accommodation**

Various new Housing initiatives are being investigated to prevent homelessness or provide support where homelessness cannot be prevented including;

- The introduction of a welfare desk where an officer within the housing team has access to benefits software and close links with the team. This should enable them to increase the provision of affordable private sector accommodation.
- A mediation service for young people to reduce homelessness through parental eviction
- From the opportunities created by Supporting People, the Council is undertaking a pilot project with WKHA to provide floating support where appropriate to people living in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The support is tailored to help with the difficulties of living in temporary accommodation, and the transition to a more permanent home. The initiative will be linked to the JAR contract with the KCC Social Services department to encourage joint working and avoid duplication.

The following schemes are used by the Council to reduce reliance upon the use of Bed & Breakfast and to provide more suitable accommodation for clients, as well as offering people choice as to where they live and what services they receive.

- The Council has nomination rights to 42 Shared Facility Apartments owned and managed by WKHA and Moat Housing Society. The apartments are located in Swanley, Sevenoaks and Edenbridge. In Swanley two of the units are wheelchair accessible. The residents share a bathroom with another household, apart from the wheelchair accessible units where the kitchen is shared.
- The Council, in partnership with TWBC, TMBC and Bailey HA provided a successful Winter Shelter for many years, but it was recognised that there was a year round need for this type of provision. Colebrook Road was developed as a short stay, direct access hostel, open throughout the year jointly funded by SDC, TWBC & TMBC and is managed by Bailey Supported Housing Services. The project provides support for rough sleepers and single homeless people with medium to high support needs, as well as helping them to gain access to permanent accommodation, education, employment, and training opportunities and health services.
- The Council launched two lodgings schemes in 2002 with the aim of assisting single people to access accommodation, addressing issues of under occupation in both the private and public sector housing stock and enabling the Council to act in accordance with its new powers arising from the Homelessness Act 2002, to provide

accommodation for those who do not qualify for assistance under the homelessness legislation.

- The Lodgings Scheme (with West Kent Housing Association) aims to recruit existing tenants who have a spare room or rooms and would benefit from an additional income. (Permission is gained from WKHA before placing a lodger)
- The Lodgings Scheme (Private Sector) aims to recruit those who own their own homes or who also privately rent accommodation (permission from any mortgage lender or landlord must be obtained before any property is accepted onto the scheme)
- Where funded places are available support can be offered to lodgers from the WKHA support team funded through Supporting People.
- The Council funded the development of Greensands managed by The Richmond Fellowship. Greensands provides 8 self-contained bedrooms with shared facilities as temporary accommodation for those with medium to high level support needs. Clients will have care and support packages arranged through the JAR process. Clients may have mental health problems and/or drug and alcohol dependency (not chaotic), are Children Act referrals or are Care Leavers. The support provided enables vulnerable people to develop skills which will help them to manage a home of their own. The Council, Social Services, The Richmond Fellowship and WKHA's Supportive Housing Team work closely together to ensure that adequate support is offered to clients when they move on to permanent housing usually offered through the SDHR. This is a good example of effective joint working resulting in appropriate temporary accommodation with support.
- Greensands has now developed 'Stepping Stones' a programme developed to assist clients preparing for independent living by gradually increasing independence without leaving clients feeling they are going it alone.
- Claremont Road, Tonbridge is a shared house with 5 bed spaces, providing supported temporary accommodation for those who have low support needs and is managed by Bailey Supported Housing Services. This scheme is a joint initiative funded between three Local Authorities, SDC, TWBC and TMBC.
- The Council also works in partnership with the Sevenoaks District Association for Mental Health and accesses two high level supported schemes designed specifically for those with mental illness such as schizophrenia. Again, intensive support is provided with a view to clients ultimately moving into independent housing.
- The Council worked in partnership with TMBC and TWBC to provide the initial capital funding for the Women's refuge. Women and their children who are victims of domestic violence can be referred to the project by the Council, the Police, other refuges, social services, probation, other agencies and self-referral.
- Private sector leasing is available through Moat Housing Society who manages and/or leases a property and then offer the property to homeless families at rent levels within housing benefit levels.

### 2.5 To develop the Council's strategic role for housing

- The Housing Section of the Council has been restructured in the last year an additional team has been created which is dedicated to reviewing and developing Housing Strategy. The team reports to the Head of Housing and is made up of a Housing Policy Officer and Housing Initiatives Officer. The Housing Policy Officer's role is to develop Housing Strategy and take a strategic role in enabling housing provision in the district. The Housing Initiative Officer is employed to investigate and develop new initiatives, in particular involving the private sector.
- The Council's website has been redesigned and is now recognised by the Society of Information Technology Management (SOCITM) as one of the most improved sites in 2003. Housing features strongly on the website and Housing Strategy is sixth in the top twenty most commonly visited web pages.
- The Council aims to increase the profile of housing with residents in order to have a greater influence on decision-making and public opinion. The Council does this by
  - holding an annual Housing Forum to facilitate discussion around housing issues in the district
  - through the media by releasing information regarding the launching of new initiatives and about new housing schemes and successes are publicised through articles placed in local newspapers and council publications.
- The Council is working closely with private sector landlords and developers to foster good working relationships and maximise the potential for partnership working;
  - hosting regular Private Landlord Forums in partnership with the Southern Private Landlords Association to discuss issues specific to the private rented sector.
  - seeking the views of the House Builders Federation and their members on important projects such as the Housing Needs Survey.
- Housing officers and planning officers meet regularly to discuss relevant issues, and have carried out a joint training session for planning officers on affordable homes and 106 agreements. We are currently working jointly to develop the Council's approach to developer contributions for affordable housing and have formed a joint working group to progress the housing needs survey.
- Monthly meetings take place with the Cabinet member for Social and Housing Services to discuss the briefing paper for members. The following matters are included in the discussions:
  - Cabinet meetings and reports
  - Future Housing Initiatives
  - Capital funding for additional affordable housing
  - Housing Strategy
  - Performance of the Social Housing team and the SDHR
  - Housing Benefits
  - Planning

- In addition to the monthly reports to members, members receive presentations on various housing issues at their Cabinet and Council meetings and the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy are taken to Council for approval.

#### 2.6 To encourage the development of sustainable rural areas

- The Rural Housing Working Group is a sub-group of Sevenoaks Rural Forum and is meeting regularly to take forward ideas generated by the 2002 Housing Forum and other sources into policy and procedures.
- Sevenoaks works in partnership with rural housing providers and enablers to promote the provision of affordable housing in rural areas, in particular with the Rural Housing Trust, Kent Rural Community Council, Parish Councils, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, and small local RSLs such as the Becketts Trust. New affordable housing in rural areas is generally only possible under the council's 'exceptions policy' in the Local Plan, and involves a considerable amount of effort by all concerned to progress a scheme to completion.
- Due to the high house prices in the rural areas it is generally too expensive to provide additional affordable housing through repurchases and DIYSO buyers find it hard to locate rural properties within the area limits set by the Housing Corporation.
- The council is keen to ensure that existing affordable housing in rural areas is used most effectively and WKHA has agreed to consider Local Lettings policies for its rural housing stock when investigating Choice Based Lettings this year.

#### 2.7 To contribute to the Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership's crime reduction programme.

- The Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership (which includes WKHA and Moat) have identified the following main areas of housing related crime:
  - Burglary from sheds and garages
  - Vehicle crime
  - Anti-social behaviour
  - Bogus callers
  - Domestic Violence
  - Racial harassment and crime against other minority groups
  - Criminal damage
- There is a 'Home Safe' scheme provided in partnership with the Police and Victim Support. This scheme aims to help victims of crime by providing emergency security work to private sector properties after a burglary to prevent repeat victimisation.
- New housing is subject to 'secure by design' scrutiny before planning permission is granted. Environmental improvements on existing developments can help to reduce the problems caused by poor design. WKHA has in 2001 invested £1 million in Edenbridge and over the last year invested £0.5 million in St Mary's, Swanley to remove alleyways and introduce 'secure by design' estate improvements, and further investment is planned for similar measures to improve community safety.

- The Council and the Police together make full use of the powers available to them to tackle the few cases of anti social behaviour in the district and have been successful in achieving three Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) plus an Interim Order against local residents. The Anti Social Behaviour Task Group addresses individual cases and during 2002/2003 has dealt with 50 individuals referred by partner agencies, 41 of whom have improved their behaviour through a variety of interventions. WKHA have probationary tenancies for all new tenants with the aim of early effective intervention if problems occur. However, the Council recognises that anti-social behaviour is present in all tenures in the district, and can often be harder to deal with in the private sector. Some of the less serious cases are suitable to be addressed by the West Kent Mediation Service that the council supports financially.
  - Vehicle crime, in particular abandoned cars being vandalised or 'joy-ridden', is being addressed by a multi-agency approach. Operation CUBIT resulted in the removal of 150 abandoned vehicles across the district in 2002/03 and a permanent county wide scheme has been set up so further successes in this area are anticipated.
  - A Domestic Violence Forum is in place to co-ordinate support to victims and multi-agency training has been carried out. This type of crime is thought to be greatly under-reported, as is racial harassment. The social housing team is now recording all racial incidents on the homelessness and housing advice databases for monitoring purposes.
  - A further area of under-reported crime is that of bogus callers, where older people can feel too embarrassed to report the incident. This type of crime can undermine the victim's confidence and lead to a loss of independence.
  - In Edenbridge a Community Warden has been appointed on a pilot basis to fulfil the following four functions:
    - Care for the street environment through enforcement of legislation and policy on abandoned vehicles, litter and dog fouling
    - Provide a reassuring presence, promote crime reduction and home security schemes, and to support vulnerable residents
    - Liase with the local Police, residents and agencies regarding crime, anti-social behaviour, bonfires and nuisance dogs
    - Promote community-led schemes
- A recent survey indicated that residents are feeling reassured by the presence of a Warden and are noticing improvement in the environment of the town.
- It is the Council's policy not to install CCTV in residential areas, however mobile cameras have been used by the Police to target anti-social behaviour and protect victims and witnesses in their communities.
  - External funding from the Home Office has been made available to disrupt drugs markets and to fund programmes and initiatives to support communities.

## Appendix 3 – Consultation

Consultation with stakeholders is of enormous importance to the Council and was identified as a priority in the recent Best Value Review. In the past 3 years the Council has carried out extensive consultation with all its stakeholders including service users and the wider community.

Below is a summary of the consultation that has taken place and the full results of the consultation are available on request.

We have demonstrated how the Council has taken action to address the issues raised and the influence of consultation on strategy formation and priorities.

### 3.1 Regional

- **Peer Group Review 2000**

Sevenoaks District Council is a member of the South East Large Scale Voluntary Transfer authorities group (SELSVT) which carries out benchmarking between members. In 2000 we took part in a peer review exercise that simulated a Best Value inspection. The strengths and weaknesses identified and the action we have taken is outlined below;

#### Strengths

- Committed staff and the Council Leader 'Values her housing staff'
- Home Energy Conservation Act work
- Joint housing register
- Joint Assessment and Referral Agreement
- Handy Person and Care and Repair
- High percentage homeless decisions made within 33 days
- Collaborative working and consultation
- Review system for homeless decisions
- Private sector grants points system
- Housing advice services

<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Actions taken</b>
Staff turnover high and staffing levels need to increase	Remains an issue although flexible working introduced in 2003 may assist in retention of staff
Housing need and stock condition surveys	Housing Needs Survey commissioned 2003 Stock Condition Survey to be commissioned by early 2004
Framework for Capital investment needed	To be addressed in 2003/04 as part of joint commissioning work
Programme delivery relatively low	Programme delivery improved see appendix 8
Houses in Multiple Occupation risk assessment required	Timetable for carrying out risk assessments to be drawn up by September 2003.

<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Actions taken</b>
Black and Minority Ethnic, Empty Homes and Supported Housing Strategies not developed.	Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy produced summer 2001 Empty Property Strategy to be completed by early 2004. Sevenoaks Supporting People Shadow Strategy now in place.
Need affordable housing policy	To be created as part of the Local Plan review
Low cost home ownership not on SDHR	Low cost home ownership included on the SDHR since 2001
Reception facilities	Reception updated to include more comfortable waiting area, hearing loop, toys for children, and a secure interview room
Housing input to Best Value not demonstrated	Best Value Review completed for Social housing in Spring 2003. Best Value Review to be completed for Private Sector Housing by December 2003

- **Single Homelessness Survey 2001**

A survey of single homeless people in the West Kent area was carried out. 17 people responded the majority were aged between 16-17 and had become homeless through friends and relatives no longer being willing to accommodate them, most had slept rough, stayed with friends or slept in cars.

Since the survey the Council has

- rolled out further consultation with single homeless people in the best value review
- is planning to fund a mediation service to help reduce homelessness as a result of parental eviction.
- Colebrook Road opened in 2002 to house people who may have been sleeping rough.

### **3.2 Corporate**

- The Citizens Panel – January 2003

In September 2002 invitations and recruitment questionnaires were sent out randomly to residents across the District and around 1000 people were recruited to form the Council's first ever Citizens Panel. The second panel in January 2003 consulted on the Council's Housing Strategy and other housing issues. The aim was to look at awareness of services provided by the Council and the importance of certain issues with the panel to ensure that these reflected the Council's priorities. Some of the key results are given below.

Before the survey 40% of panel members were aware that the Council produces a Housing Strategy. Panel members then considered how important they thought a number of priorities for the Housing Strategy are. The priorities have been presented in order of perceived importance; the percentage in brackets represents the proportion thinking the priority is either 'very important' or 'important'.

To work in partnership on crime reduction initiative related to housing	(95%)
To promote balanced and sustainable communities	(85%)
To increase the amount of affordable housing in the district	(84%)
To tackle homelessness	(79%)
To improve the state of repair of properties in the district	(79%)
Address housing problems in rural areas	(76%)
To raise importance of housing as a local issue	(62%)

Panel members considered what they thought to be the most important housing issues in the district. The lack of affordable housing, mentioned by 47% of panel members, was clearly seen as the most important issue. The next most important issues were identified as being the lack of housing for the younger generation (7%) and housing development on green space (6%).

Respondents were clearly supportive of energy efficiency initiatives with over nine out of ten panel members (92%) stating that it is important to reduce energy consumption in the district to lower carbon dioxide emissions that can contribute to global climate change and 84% stating that it is important for the council to provide energy efficiency advice.

It should be noted that the survey also covered crime and community safety issues and that may have led to more respondents ranking crime reduction initiatives so highly.

- **The Housing Needs Survey 2003/2004**

The Housing Team led the commissioning of the Housing Needs Survey working in close collaboration with the Planning team.

In Summer 2003 the Council will consult with 2,400 of their residents regarding details of their housing and socio-economic status. This will enable better prioritisation of resources for affordable housing and people with special needs and will be considered as part of developing affordable housing policies in the SDLP review.

- **The Stock Condition Survey 2004/2005**

The Housing Team will lead the commissioning of the Stock Condition Survey and will work closely with all other relevant teams within the Council. The Survey will involve 1000 – 2000 surveys of residents' homes across the district to gain information on repair against the decent homes standard and energy efficiency. These will allow the Council to target resources more efficiently and effectively to improve housing conditions.

### 3.3 Housing Teams

- **Black and Minority Ethnic Survey 2002**

A survey of Black and Minority Ethnic groups has been carried out. The survey considered accessibility of housing services and levels of satisfaction with the services provided by the housing teams within the Council and the Council's Housing Register.

In total 120 survey forms were sent out and we received 21 completed surveys this is a response rate of 18%.

As the table below shows overall satisfaction levels were very high

	<b>SDHR</b>	<b>SDC</b>
Overall opinion of the services provided	88% - Good/excellent	80% - Good/excellent service
The quality of the information and advice given to you	76% - Good	75% - Good/excellent
The helpfulness and politeness of staff	100% - Good/excellent	95% - Good/excellent

Some issues were highlighted for attention; an improvement plan was formulated to address these issues. The following improvements have been made to date

<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Actions taken</b>
There is confusion over services provided by the local authority and services provided by local Housing Associations in the area	Planned improvements to publicity and signposting.
There was a lack of awareness of services offered by the Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter, the Local Authority and local Housing Associations to assist those with communication	Language Line is available for translation and interpretation to all Council staff, Shelter and the Citizens Advice Bureau  The Local Authority now has posters in reception areas advertising Language Line and advertises the services on their web site.
Respondents highlighted the need to support customers who have difficulties with communication because they do not speak English as their first language or because of literacy problems.	Language Line training is now available to staff to help them assist customers who do not speak English.
Some concerns were raised over awareness of other cultures by staff.	WKHA now train all staff in racial equalities issues SDC plans to make training available to staff Shelter and the Citizens Advice Bureau have training available for staff.

- **Best Value Review – Social Housing 2002**

The results of the Best Value Review have revealed evidence of the importance of the priority areas in the Housing Strategy and have influenced the setting of objectives under these areas in 2003. A more detailed analysis of the results can be found in 'Best Value Review of Housing Services Reports' 2003.

Customer satisfaction questionnaires

A variety of questionnaires were drawn up in line with the Council's consultation strategy to gauge the satisfaction of customers on the services provided. The following areas have been looked at; many of the questionnaires continue to be used on an ongoing basis.

- Housing Advice Questionnaire for service users
- Homelessness Questionnaire for service users
- The Homelessness – Temporary Accommodation Questionnaire for service users
- The Private Sector Letting Team Questionnaire for services users
- The Housing Team Questionnaire for internal staff and Councillors
- The Housing Team Questionnaire for external agencies
- The Grants Questionnaire for service users

Staff Survey

156 SDC staff and 83 WKHA staff completed the surveys.

It was envisaged that the information gathered would support the need for affordable housing, feed into the Best Value Review, and assist in the consideration of a definition of key workers for the district.

The survey clearly demonstrated a need for affordable housing in the district amongst SDC and WKHA staff. Of those wishing to move into the district both SDC and WKHA respondents maintained that buying suitable house within the district was the main obstacle to moving.

The survey showed that very few respondents were on the SDHR and that patterns of housing need amongst staff differs from the patterns of housing need on the SDHR generally. In particular with reference to location and size of housing required.

The findings of the survey will be followed by further research through the Housing Needs Survey. The survey could also be rolled out to other organisations that wish to take part to build on the evidence already collated.

- **Stakeholders Perception Study – carried out by external consultants – February 2003**

Dome Consultants undertook 19 face to face, semi-structured interviews with external agencies that work with the Council;

- 7 other Local Authorities or Statutory Agencies

- 5 Registered Social Landlords
- 4 Voluntary Agencies

The participants were asked to compare SDC housing department with the best other organisations they were aware of and indicate the relative importance of attributes and competence to provide services. The study was intended to inform the review and to act as a reality check.

Tables showing the strengths and weaknesses of the following services were drawn up and the results fed into the Housing Best Value Review which drew up improvement plans for each of the areas;

- Homelessness
  - Housing Advice
  - Housing Strategy and Enabling Role
  - Housing Register
  - Housing Standards and Enforcement including HMO's
  - Care and Repair and Energy Conservation
  - Travellers and Mobile Homes
- **Homelessness Strategy Review – January 2003**

The Council in partnership with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council commissioned external consultants to carry out a review of homelessness producing separate reports for the two districts. The findings of the review directly informed the development of the Homelessness Strategy. The Homelessness Strategy has laid out objectives of its own which are included under priority Tackling Homelessness

Consultation with stakeholders commenced at the Housing Forum in January 2003, this was followed by a series of focus groups of stakeholders and staff and semi-structured interviews of key individuals.

A Homelessness Strategy Groups was formed with the purpose of acting as a reality check and sounding board for strategy development.

The broad priorities for the future developed by stakeholders are as follows

- To make creative use of existing resources
- To increase joint working across geographical boundaries
- To improve Inter agency work
- Allocate a higher priority to prevention work
- Sustainability is paramount
- Address gaps in services to people with support needs

These priorities clearly reflect the priorities and objectives set out to meet the priority areas within the Housing Strategy, showing the clear links between the two strategies.

• **Housing Forum 2003**

At the housing forum workshops are held to ask for peoples ideas on some of our key priority areas. In the 2003 Forum views were requested on Affordable Housing, Crime and Community Safety, and Homelessness. Results are summarised in the table below:

Group	Comments
Affordable Housing	<p>Important because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obligation to stop using Bed and Breakfast for homeless people by 2004</li> <li>• It's a corporate objective and from Best Value review</li> <li>• GOSE requirements</li> </ul> <p>Definition of Affordable Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some degree of subsidy</li> <li>• Cross-boundary working on definition</li> <li>• Should be based on people working in the district</li> <li>• Targeting those on low income not just welfare benefits</li> <li>• Supply needs to match demand</li> <li>• Need to reflect in local plan review</li> <li>• Should be based on household income not just salary</li> </ul> <p>Definition of Key Workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Government Officers should be included</li> <li>• Those who provide local services to local people</li> <li>• Health workers/Police/Teachers = national choices</li> <li>• Those who need affordable housing</li> <li>• Wider groups</li> <li>• Permanent or temporary employment</li> <li>• Those who buy or those who rent properties</li> </ul> <p>New Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at successful schemes in other countries</li> <li>• Carry out Housing Needs Surveys link into local plan</li> <li>• Work more closely with developers</li> <li>• Commuted Sums</li> <li>• Encourage Elderly to move into Sheltered accommodation</li> </ul>

<b>Group</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Crime and Community Safety	<p><b>Issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victims</li> <li>• Youth</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Damage/Graffiti</li> <li>• Car/Vehicle crime</li> <li>• Anti social behaviour</li> <li>• Burglary</li> </ul> <p><b>Solutions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education/Information</li> <li>• Community response</li> <li>• Multi agency</li> <li>• Youth</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Police/enforcement</li> </ul>
Homelessness	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outreach workers</li> <li>• Private Sector Lettings Scheme</li> <li>• Private landlord forums quarterly</li> <li>• Developing empty property strategy – e.g. over shops</li> <li>• Trying to tie in landlords to nomination scheme</li> <li>• Partnership working – especially Social Services and neighbouring Local Authorities</li> <li>• Colebrook Road</li> <li>• Strong links with other advice agencies</li> <li>• Joint referral assessment process</li> </ul> <p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of accommodation – young pregnant teenagers need support services</li> <li>• Too many contacts for homeless – particularly young people – barriers</li> <li>• Housing benefit not reaching private rent levels. where rent is high – means unable to access employment, and deposit problems</li> <li>• Accessing regional money</li> <li>• Need top quality accommodation and support services</li> <li>• Gap between strategy and operations</li> <li>• Some clients do not fit the parameters of JARP</li> </ul> <p><b>Solutions</b> – these are detailed in the Council’s Homelessness Strategy</p>

The issues raised in the groups show that there is support for further research into defining key workers and affordable housing and support for a cross boundary, cross departmental approach. Some of the issues raised by the groups are reflected in the objectives set in appendix 1.

- **Rural Housing Forums 2002 and 2003**

In direct response to issues raised at the Housing Forum 2002 a Rural Housing Working Group was formed (Planning, Housing, Rural Housing Trust, Kent Rural Community Council and WKHA) The group have carried out two Rural Housing Forums (November 2002 at Farningham and June 2003 at Eynsford)

The forums have been designed to inform and consult with those attending on issues of affordable housing in rural areas.

## Appendix 4 - BME Housing Strategy

### Contents

1. Introduction
  - The Legislative Background
  - Ethnic Diversity in the Sevenoaks District
2. Objectives
  - Long and Short term objectives
  - Examples of Joined Up Working
3. Implementing the Strategy
  - What we been done so far?
  - The Implementation Plan

### Section 1 – Introduction

#### The Legislative Background

The changes in guidance and legislation demonstrate the need for a clear plan of action to address issues relating to Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) Groups.

The Housing Investment Program (HIP) Guidance for English local authorities issued in 2000 addresses 'race' issues and states that it is particularly important that all local housing authorities should ensure that the needs and aspirations of black and minority ethnic people and communities form an integral part of the local housing strategy.

The amendments to the Race Relations Act which came into affect in April 2001 place a new duty on local authorities to monitor their staff by ethnicity, to assess the impact on racial equality of new policies and to consult on them. Local Authorities will also need to monitor the impact on racial equality of existing policies and practice. Many of the changes had already been brought to the attention of local authorities through the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report.

The Housing Corporation of the South East has set regional objectives and have particular concerns for local authorities with small numbers of black people and ethnic minorities.

*'Policies need to reflect the needs of the different ethnic groups who may wish to access the services they provide. This is especially significant in those Local Authorities with small numbers of BME households who may be living in isolated circumstances and may not be able to receive the support of community groups based in the larger urban authorities.'*  
(Housing Corporation South East 'BME Housing Strategy 1999' pg. 6)

#### Ethnic Diversity in the Sevenoaks District Area

The term 'black and minority ethnic' (BME) is used throughout this document. The phrase 'black and minority ethnic people' includes Irish people in Britain and the Traveller community. The court of appeal held in the *Commission for Racial Equality –v- Dutton* in

1988 that gypsies were an identifiable minority group who constituted a racial group within the meaning of the 1976 Act.

The 1991 Census showed that 1.3% of the population were from an ethnic minority however the breakdown of ethnic minorities in the 2001 Census was more sophisticated and included ethnic minorities amongst the white population. The 2001 Census showed that 5.9% of the population considered themselves to be of an ethnic origin other than White British. The number remains lower than the Kent County figure of 6.2% of households.

If we rely on the figures from the 2001 Census it appears that ethnic minorities are represented proportionally amongst those applying for permanent social housing. In April 2003 approximately 6% of applicants on the Housing Needs Register were from an ethnic origin other than 'British'. Sevenoaks District Council accepted a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation for 172 homeless households in the last financial year, of these 3 were from ethnic minorities.

The local authority has not accepted a statutory duty towards any asylum seeker households in the last year.

The Housing Corporation noted in the regional BME strategy that ethnic minorities are over represented amongst those households in acute housing need. This highlighted the need to establish an effective means of consultation and to identify the housing problems experienced by people from ethnic minorities. Preliminary consultation with BME groups in the Sevenoaks District has taken place and this will be followed up through the Housing Needs Survey and the Stock Condition Survey whose specifications give detailed requirements on the need for information amongst BME groups.

Travellers and Gypsies make up a sizable minority within Sevenoaks. The Kent County Council Gypsy count in January 2003 showed that 137 households lived in caravans. This represents 20% of the total number recorded within Kent, the second highest number after Maidstone. It should be noted that this figure does not include settled Travellers and Gypsies living in private properties and social housing as accurate records are not kept at this time. The Housing Policy section has sought to improve links with social services and the education department so that statistical information and research can be shared. This information in conjunction with the results of the Housing Needs Survey should give us much more accurate information in this area in the future.

## **Section 2 – Objectives**

### **Long and short term objectives**

In the short term Sevenoaks District Council has three main aims:

1. Improving monitoring, delivery and access to Housing for all BME groups.
2. Promoting understanding of racial equality within the housing service
3. Identifying local need and housing issues for BME groups through consultation including surveys and focus groups.

To successfully achieve this we must incorporate national and regional objectives. Our wider objectives are: -

- ❑ to promote race equality
- ❑ to work with RSLs to ensure that BME groups can access services and receive a high level of service
- ❑ to identify local housing need amongst BME communities and to ensure that capital investment and delivery of services reflects this;
- ❑ to monitor effectively complaints regarding racial harassment and discrimination around housing issues.
- ❑ to promote greater accountability and contribute to the objectives of empowerment of tenants and community development and sustainability;
- ❑ ensuring there is a corporate approach and that the BME strategy contributes to the success of other associated strategies.

#### Examples of Joined up Working

The two examples below show how the BME Strategy relates to other strategies.

##### 1. Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership

The district council is a key partner in the Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership, which was set up in response to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The partnership with TWBC and T&MBC has set up a call centre providing twenty-four hour reporting arrangements within the area.

The call centre went live in April 2003 and allows local people to report racial incidents, which can then be investigated. The recording of such incidents will enable all agencies in the area to be aware of the level of racial crime or harassment.

##### 2. Supporting People

Supporting People offers vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life by providing individual services enabling them to have greater independence. The Council works in partnership with health, probation, social services, RSL's and service users to provide a co-ordinated response to provide housing related services.

The Kent County Council Supporting People Shadow Statement 2002/2003 showed that there were very few culturally specific providers of support in Kent and a definite shortage of specific services for religious groups, asylum seekers and Travellers and Gypsies. The review process taking place in 2003-2006 will attempt to ensure that in all services, gaps or inequalities are addressed.

### **Section 3 – Implementing the BME Strategy**

Work has already begun to implement this strategy. We are in the process of building up a network of contacts from BME groups or from organisations representing or working with BME groups. The list is gradually increasing and includes housing service users and churches, community groups and local businesses.

A survey of people in Black and Minority Ethnic Groups has been carried out. The survey considered accessibility of housing services and levels of satisfaction with the service provided.

The survey will also act as a means of obtaining more information on ethnicity in the district and identified issues that need to be addressed to improve the service provided.

The survey resulted in an action plan for improvements in service delivery and consultation. The survey highlighted the need for more detailed consultation with BME groups which guided the Council when drawing up the specifications for the Housing Needs Survey and Stock Condition Survey. Customer satisfaction surveys are carried out on an ongoing basis by the Housing Teams these now include references to peoples ethnic origin so that any particular areas of concern for ethnic minorities can be analysed from the results.

The housing team will be represented on the Council's cross- departmental setting group working on the Local Government Equality Standard ensuring that service delivery improvements and consultation findings are raised at a corporate level.

This strategy is a working document, which will be built upon on a yearly basis and monitored closely.

## **Appendix 5 - Housing Renewal Policy 2003**

### **1. Introduction**

This policy seeks to:

- improve the condition of private sector housing in the District as stated within the Council's Housing Strategy
- increase the number of properties available for occupation
- increase the energy efficiency of homes and address issues of fuel poverty and affordable warmth
- assist those who would otherwise not be in a position to improve or repair their homes, including first time buyers and key workers
- improve security measures, particularly for the elderly, disabled and vulnerable groups
- provide adaptations for the benefit of disabled persons
- encourage partnership working with neighbouring authorities and external agencies with a view to improving service delivery
- develop relationships with financial institutions in order to investigate suitable loan products, for example, equity release or similar schemes
- develop relationships within the Council to reflect community based initiatives, including those relating to crime and disorder and area regeneration

The renewal policy shall come into effect on 1 July 2003.

Priority will be given to dealing with enquiries and applications from the elderly, disabled and vulnerable groups.

Future policy will reflect the findings of the Council's Housing Needs and Stock Condition Survey.

The Council has a statutory responsibility to survey its housing stock from time to time and to take appropriate action regarding unfitness and disrepair. This action may take the form of enforcement action through the service of Notice and/or grant assistance, subject to meeting qualifying conditions and circumstances being in accord with the Council's renewal policy.

**The Council may specify in detail within their Housing Renewal Policy the purposes for which applications for assistance are to be invited and reserves the right to specify different purposes from time to time to reflect current priorities, strategic objectives and budgetary constraints.**

## **2. Purpose of Housing Assistance**

Housing assistance may be offered by Sevenoaks District Council ("the Council") in accordance with this policy toward the cost of: -

- the improvement, repair or adaptation of living accommodation including mobile homes and houseboats
- the demolition of buildings comprising or including living accommodation and the construction of replacement living accommodation
- the acquisition of alternative living accommodation where the existing home is considered by the Council to be unsuitable for improvement, repair or adaptation

## **3. Persons eligible to apply for Housing Assistance**

Any person who makes an application for assistance must: -

- live in the dwelling as his/her only or main residence (except where the applicant is a landlord who intends to let the dwelling to someone other than a family member), and
- have an owner's interest in the dwelling, or be a tenant or licensee of the dwelling, alone or jointly with others, and
- have a duty to carry out the works in question or have the owner's written consent to do so, and
- satisfy such test(s) of financial resources as the Council may impose from time to time

## **4. Applications for assistance**

An application for assistance must be in a form specified by the Council and shall include:

- full particulars of the proposed works including, where relevant, plans and specifications of the works for which assistance is being sought
- at least two itemised quotations from independent building contractors unless otherwise directed by the Council
- particulars of any professional fees or other charges which relate to the preparation of the scheme, the supervision of the works or the administration of the contract
- proof concerning the ownership or tenancy of the dwelling
- written consent from all owners of the dwelling to the carrying out of the proposed works
- written consent of the mortgages
- if the applicant is the owner of the dwelling, an undertaking that the dwelling will be occupied as their only or main residence for a period of 5 years from completion of the works and to repay any grant in circumstances such as those described in section 13 upon demand.

- if the applicant is a landlord, an undertaking that the dwelling shall be let as a residence to persons nominated by the Council throughout a period of 5 years (or such other period of time as may be agreed between the applicant and the Council) from completion of the works and to repay any grant in circumstances such as those described in section 13 upon demand.

#### **5. Prior Qualifying Period**

The Council may specify in their Housing Renewal Policy a period of time during which the applicant must have lived in the dwelling as his/her only or main residence prior to the date of the application for assistance and reserves the right to specify different periods for different purposes.

#### **6. Amount of Assistance**

The Council may specify within their Housing Renewal Policy a maximum amount or a formula for calculating the maximum amount of assistance which may be paid in respect of an application for assistance and reserves the right to specify different maxima for works of different purposes.

#### **7. Exclusion of works already carried out**

The Council will not approve an application for assistance if the works in question have been carried out before the application for assistance has been approved, except:

- where the relevant works have commenced but have not been completed and the Council is satisfied that there were good reasons for beginning the works prior to the approval of the application.
- where the Council decide to approve an application in accordance with the above they may, with the consent of the applicant, treat the application as varied so that the assisted works do not include any that have been completed.

#### **8. Decision and Notification**

The Council will notify an applicant in writing whether the application is approved or refused as soon as is reasonably practicable and, in any event, no later than three months from receipt of a complete and valid application for assistance.

If the application is approved, the notification will confirm the eligible works, the amount of assistance and the form that the assistance will take.

If the application is refused, the Council will explain the reasons for refusal and the procedure for appealing the decision.

If the Council are satisfied that, owing to circumstances beyond the control of the applicant or their professional advisor(s), the cost of the works has increased e.g. due to additional works being discovered upon exposure, then the Council may re-determine the amount of assistance and notify the applicant accordingly. The Council cannot guarantee that further funding will be made available and applicants must proceed on this basis. Additional funding will not be made available if the additional works could have been reasonably foreseen at the time of application.

## **9. Supervision of the works**

The responsibility for the supervision of the works rests with the applicant or their appointed agent. The Council strongly recommends that applicants engage a suitably qualified surveyor/architect/structural engineer as appropriate to liaise with the Council, prepare a scheme, supervise the works and submit requests for payment.

The Council accepts no responsibility for the supervision of works.

## **10. Payments**

The Council will release payment if:

- the works are completed within six months from the date of approval (twelve months in the case of an application for Disabled Facilities Grant) or such other period as the council may allow
- the works are carried out in accordance with such specifications as the Council may determine
- the works are carried out by one of the contractors whose quotations formed part of the application for assistance
- the works are carried out to the Council's satisfaction
- the Council is provided with an acceptable invoice, demand or receipt for payment for the works and any professional fees or associated charges. An invoice, demand or receipt from a member of the applicant or a member of the applicant's family will not be considered acceptable
- any guarantees, certificates etc works are submitted to the Council
- the works satisfy Building Regulations, Conservation Area/Listed Buildings requirements, Environment Agency requirements etc

The Council will normally pay the assistance direct to the applicant or the applicant's agent.

The Council will pay the assistance upon satisfactory completion of the specified works. One interim payment may be considered at the Council's discretion. Further interim payments will only normally be considered for large contracts and by prior arrangement with the Council.

## **11. Repayment where an applicant is not entitled to assistance**

If an application for assistance is approved but it subsequently appears to the Council that the applicant (or, in the case of a joint application, any of the applicants) was not, at the time the application was approved, entitled to assistance, no payment would be made. The Council may demand that any payments that have already been made are repaid together with interest from the date upon which they were made until repayment at such reasonable rate as the Council may determine.

## **12. Conditions for Repayment of Assistance**

These conditions relate to all forms of discretionary assistance, including Home Repairs Assistance. They do not relate to Disabled Facilities Grant.

If an owner of the dwelling to which the application relates ceases to be the owner before the works are completed, he/she will be required to repay to the Council upon demand the amount of any assistance that has been paid.

If an owner of the dwelling to which the application relates ceases to be the owner of that dwelling within five years from the date the works were completed, he/she will be required to repay to the Council upon demand the amount of assistance that has been paid

If an owner of the dwelling to which the application relates, having undertaken to let the dwelling, ceases to let the dwelling in accordance with that undertaking within five years of the date upon which the works were completed, he/she will be required to repay to the Council upon demand the amount of assistance that has been paid.

**Where the Council has a right to demand repayment of the assistance but there are extenuating circumstances e.g. the sale of the subject property in order to move into sheltered housing or residential care, the Council may determine not to demand repayment or to demand a lesser amount.**

Any condition, which creates a liability to repay the assistance in the event of a breach, shall be a local land charge and shall be disclosed to a purchaser's or vendor's solicitor in the event of a local land charges search being received by the Council.

### **13. Additional conditions**

Where the Council considers that there are good reasons for doing so, additional conditions may be imposed with the consent of the applicant. If such conditions are considered unacceptable to the applicant, the Council reserves the right to refuse the application if it considers it appropriate to do so.

The additional conditions may include (but are not restricted to):

- the right of the Council to nominate tenants to the living accommodation
- the right of the Council to recover specialised equipment when no longer required
- the appointment of managing agents to let the living accommodation

The liability to repay the assistance may be discharged at any time by paying to the Council a sum equal to the amount of assistance or such lesser sum as the Council may agree.

**14. Successive applications for assistance**

Except in the case of Disabled Facilities Grant, applications for further assistance will not normally be considered unless three years have passed since the last application for assistance. This period may be reviewed by the Council to take into account the individual circumstances of a case and may be waived or reduced accordingly.

Simultaneous applications for assistance will not normally be considered unless it can be demonstrated that there are particularly good reasons for doing so e.g. health and safety considerations.

**15. Sources of external (non-grant) funding**

The Council intends to investigate the suitability of loan products, equity release and similar products in partnership with Kent local authorities and an external provider. It is intended that these loans may be accessed by those who are ineligible for grant assistance or where some form of "top up" may be required. Subject to further investigation, the Council does not itself intend to offer loan products but instead seeks to direct homeowners to external financial institutions with the necessary expertise and experience in this field. Further details will be included within a revised future policy document.

**16. Moat Care & Repair**

The Sevenoaks home improvement agency, which includes the Handyperson service, is administered by Moat Housing Society, based in Sevenoaks. The services of Care & Repair are considered fundamental to the delivery of the aims of the renewal policy. The scheme provides technical, administrative and practical support to those who are considering repairs, improvements or adaptations to their homes. The scheme may be accessed by those aged over 60 (although this may be subject to negotiation dependant upon the circumstances) and those considering adaptations for the benefit of disabled persons, irrespective of their age.

Care & Repair are also able to access financial advice and information regarding loans and equity release or similar schemes.

Home Improvement Agencies are an integral part of the Supporting People programme and from 2004, Government funding for these agencies will be made available through this means.

The potential for additional partnerships e.g. with health authorities and Primary Care Trusts are to be investigated further and will link into future renewal policies.

The Handyperson service is provided by Care & Repair and offers practical assistance with a wide range of minor repairs and improvements. Typically, the Handyperson scheme includes:

- Minor repairs e.g. replacing tap washers, repairing leaking gutters, minor carpentry work etc
- Crime Prevention e.g. fitting window and door locks, door viewers etc
- Accident Prevention e.g. fixing loose floorboards and carpets

- Home safety e.g. fitting smoke detectors, fitting handrails etc
- Energy efficiency e.g. accessing external funding to fit draught proofing, loft insulation etc

The scheme is not available for redecoration works and gardening. The Council is unable to offer assistance in these circumstances.

### **17. The application process – an overview**

Upon receipt of an enquiry, the Council aims to supply an enquiry form, together with relevant booklets, policy etc within 5 working days. The Council will continue to use the test of resources (means test) associated with the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 in order to calculate the applicant's contribution (if any) until such time as an alternative mechanism becomes available and is considered suitable.

The Council will aim to advise the applicant of the result of their test of resources within 10 working days of receipt of a completed enquiry form.

**IMPORTANT – it is essential that no works are carried out prior to the issue of a Notice of Approval, unless authorised in writing by the Council. Failure to observe this requirement, or removing/disturbing evidence to confirm the need for the works, will result in the works being considered ineligible for assistance**

The following is intended as a brief overview of the application process and is for general guidance only. The type of grant and the circumstances surrounding the application will have a bearing upon the procedures. Further details of the process are available from the Private Sector Housing Team.

- enquiry form received by the Council, the prospective applicant's contribution (if any) calculated and the applicant advised
- inspection of the property to determine the eligible works.
- schedule of eligible works prepared and sent to the applicant together with the relevant application forms, booklets, copies of conditions etc (if an agent has been engaged, this will be sent to the applicant via the agent)
- applicant/agent obtains at least two competitive quotation from building contractors and submits these to the Council together with all other application papers
- the Council registers the application as valid, processes the application (based upon the most competitive of the quotations submitted) and issues a Notice of Approval/Refusal
- works are completed
- payments request(s) received and grant monies released, subject to receipt of guarantees, building control approval, satisfactory invoices etc

- entry placed upon the Council's Local Land Charges register to confirm the payment of assistance. In the event of a breach of conditions, the Council will seek recovery of all monies paid, subject to certain exemptions.

### **18. Mandatory Grant - Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)**

This is a mandatory grant, the Council is under an obligation to make funding available toward the cost of adapting a property for the benefit of a disabled person, subject to the scheme being considered "necessary and appropriate" (by Kent County Council's Occupational Therapy and Sensory Disabilities Bureau) and "reasonable and practicable" by Sevenoaks District Council, taking into account the age and condition of the subject property.

Applications are currently subject to a ceiling of £25,000 per application

DFGs are subject to a statutory test of resources (means test) in order to calculate the applicant's contribution (if any).

The Council is under a statutory duty to complete the processing of an application for DFG within 6 months of receipt of a complete and valid application. In practice, the Council seeks to complete the processing of DFG applications within a considerably shorter timescale (target 2 months or less) although this will depend upon the individual officer's caseload and other commitments. The grant-aided works must be completed to the Council's satisfaction within 12 months from the date of the Notice of Approval.

The Council will consider applications for DFG from eligible applicants, including those occupying qualifying park homes and houseboats.

The Council will not normally consider exceeding the mandatory DFG ceiling (presently £25,000) unless it can be demonstrated that there are exceptional reasons for doing so. Any applications for discretionary assistance, for example to "top up" the mandatory grant will be considered by the Team Leader, Private Sector Housing, in consultation with the Head of Housing and the Cabinet Member for Social and Housing Services.

### **19. Discretionary assistance (General)**

The Council will consider applications for all forms of discretionary assistance where it can be demonstrated that reasonable steps have been taken to fund the works through alternative means, for example through conventional loans, equity release or similar schemes. The Council accepts that loan products may not always be appropriate and will seek to target limited funds to those in the greatest need.

**For this reason, it cannot be assumed that any form of discretionary funding will be available.**

Enquiries will be prioritised to take into account financial need, the nature of the work and the urgency.

In principle, the Council takes the view that the responsibility for the repair and improvement of property rests with the owner. Discretionary grant assistance will normally only be available where it can be demonstrated that other funding options have been explored and eliminated, or where the use of grant funds assists the Council in meeting its

strategic objectives e.g. in returning long-term vacant properties into use, improving energy efficiency, addressing fuel poverty, ensuring that homes meet the “Decent Homes” standard and where the property is to be used for social housing purposes (i.e. housing provision for homeless persons).

Generally, applications for all forms of discretionary assistance will only be considered in the following circumstances: -

- Where essential works are required to render a property fit for human habitation e.g. through the provision of adequate kitchen and bathroom facilities, to address serious disrepair, dampness or structural instability.
- Where essential works are urgently required in order to enable a vulnerable occupant to remain in occupation or to prevent housing conditions worsening, for example through ingress of rainwater
- Where essential works are required to improve the thermal performance of a property or to address issues of fuel poverty where it can be demonstrated that other forms of funding, for example through “Warm Front” have been fully explored and eliminated. Such works will be subject to a SAP assessment (a measure of the thermal performance of a dwelling), with priority given to those properties with a SAP of less than 30.

Generally, applications for all forms of discretionary assistance will not normally be considered in the following circumstances:

- for non-essential repairs or for works which are considered desirable rather than essential (including kitchen and bathroom refurbishments to replace dated but otherwise serviceable fittings)
- for repairs to porches, conservatories, sheds, outbuildings, garden fences, boundary walls etc
- for cosmetic repairs, redecoration and cleaning works, except where necessary to facilitate hospital discharge
- for the replacement of windows and doors on grounds of energy efficiency unless considered by the Council to be in serious disrepair and beyond overhaul
- for completing DIY jobs
- for the funding of works which would normally be covered by a household insurance policy. The grant is not intended to be an alternative to insurance cover

#### **Applications from owner/occupiers**

Where funding permits, the Council will consider applications for assistance from qualifying applicants, priority being given to clients of the Care & Repair scheme.

A qualifying 3-year prior residency condition will be applied in all cases except those relating to first time buyers, key workers and where properties which have been vacant for more than 3 years. In such circumstances, the 3-year qualifying period will be waived

subject to receipt of acceptable documentary proof and the approval of the Head of Housing.

In terms of the condition of the subject property, priority will be given where properties are considered to be unfit for human habitation or in serious disrepair.

The Council will continue to use the “test of resources” (means test) associated with the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 until such time as an alternative assessment becomes available and is considered suitable.

Assistance will be subject to a ceiling of £10,000 per application and only above this level in exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the Head of Housing.

Where practicable, energy efficiency measures will continue to be incorporated within schedules of grant eligible works although where alternative sources of funding exist for such works e.g. through external partner agencies, applicants will be expected to investigate and access such funds before seeking renovation grant funding.

The Council will seek to complete the processing of applications for assistance from owner/occupiers and qualifying tenants within 8 weeks of receipt of a valid application.

All works must be completed to the Council’s satisfaction within 6 months from the issue of the Notice of Approval unless the Council has formally agreed an extension in writing.

All applicants will be required to confirm in writing that they intend to occupy the subject property as their only or main residence for a period of 5 years from the grant completion date. An entry will be made to this effect within the Council’s Local Land Charges Register.

### **Applications from Landlords**

Where funding permits, the Council will consider applications for assistance from landlords where works are required to meet the statutory standard, subject to the Council receiving tenancy nomination rights.

Priority will be given to applicants who intend to bring a long-term vacant property back into use in Swanley, Sevenoaks town and Edenbridge town areas and/or where the property is to be used for social housing purposes (i.e. housing provision for homeless persons).

Assistance will be subject to a ceiling of £10,000 per application and will be calculated at the rate of 75% of the eligible cost or £10,000, whichever is the lower. In exceptional cases, generally where the works will assist the Council in meeting its strategic objectives, it may be possible to exceed the ceiling with the approval of the Head of Housing.

Where practicable, energy efficiency measures will continue to be incorporated within schedules of eligible works although where alternative sources of funding exist for such works e.g. through external partner agencies, applicants will be expected to investigate and access such funds before seeking financial assistance from the Council.

The Council will seek to complete the processing of applications from landlords within 12 weeks of receipt of a complete and valid application.

All works must be carried out within 6 months from the issue of the Notice of Approval, unless the Council has formally agreed an extension in writing.

All applicants will be required to confirm in writing that they intend to let the subject property to someone other than a member of their family for a period of 5 years from the grant completion date. An entry will be made to this effect within the Council's Local Land Charges Register. Failure to comply with this condition will result in the Council seeking to recover all grant monies paid.

Further details are available upon request.

## **20. Home Repair Assistance (HRA)**

HRA is a discretionary form of assistance, intended to be used for small-scale works of repair, improvement or adaptation to a dwelling, houseboat or mobile home.

Where funding permits, the Council will consider applications for HRA from qualifying applicants. Applicants must:

- be aged 18 or over on the date of application
- occupy the dwelling as their only residence or care for an elderly, disabled or infirm person
- have an owners interest in the dwelling, alone or jointly with others, or occupy under a right of exclusive occupation granted for life or for a period of over 5 years
- have a duty to carry out the works in question
- be in receipt of a qualifying income-related benefit, regardless of the applicant's age e.g. income support, income-based job seekers allowance, working families tax credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit or disabled person's tax credit.
- have occupied the subject property as their only residence for a period of 3 years prior to the receipt of the application

The 3-year qualifying period will not apply where:

- the works are to adapt a dwelling to enable an elderly, disabled or infirm person who lives in the dwelling as their only residence to be cared for
- the works relate to the means of escape in case of fire or other fire precautions or
- where the Council considers it inappropriate to do so taking into account the circumstances of the applicant.

Priority will be given to clients of the Care & Repair scheme. Where works relate to adaptations for the benefit of a disabled person, such works must be supported by the Occupational Therapist.

HRA applications are subject to a ceiling of £5000 per application. Unless there are exceptional reasons for doing so, the Council will not consider more than one application relating to the subject property during any three-year period.

The Council seeks to complete the processing of a complete and valid HRA application within 4 weeks of receipt.

All works must be completed to the Council's satisfaction within 6 months from the date of the Notice of Approval unless the Council has formally agreed an extension in writing.

Further details concerning HRA are available upon request.

## **21. Fees and Charges**

The Council will consider reasonable fees and charges associated with the preparation, submission and supervision of a scheme as eligible for inclusion within grant calculations providing that they relate to grant eligible works.

Typically, these might include the fees and charges relating to: -

- engaging a suitably qualified building surveyor, architect, structural engineer or managing agent to liaise with the Council, to prepare a scheme, to supervise the works and to authorise payments
- building regulations, Environment Agency or similar fees
- legal fees associated with the completion of the certificate of ownership or mortgagees consent form
- fees associated with specialist tests e.g. electrical and gas safety tests

Generally, the Council would expect professional fees and charges to fall within the scale of charges suggested by the relevant professional body. The Council reserves the right to determine the level of fees and charges it considers appropriate.

## **22. Energy Conservation**

The Council has a duty to promote energy efficiency and to reduce harmful global emissions under the Home energy Conservation Act 1995. The Council is also under an obligation to address issues of fuel poverty and affordable warmth since these are closely linked to ill health and sub standard living conditions.

The Council will continue to refer enquiries to the Kent Energy Centre (see section 29 for details) and to access energy conservation and efficiency measures via the KASH scheme, in partnership with other Kent authorities and external partners.

The Council will also refer enquiries to the "Warm Front" scheme but, since this is not designed to for emergency works, the Council will access other forms of discretionary funding where necessary. The Council will continue to promote the West Kent Healthy Homes Scheme.

Where funding permits, the Council will continue to make assistance available to elderly, disabled and vulnerable groups and will, where practicable, include energy conservation measures within schedules of works, priority being given to properties with an SAP rating of less than 30.

### **23. Consultation**

The Council intends to consult the following in developing and implementing the renewal policy: -

- Sevenoaks District Council Citizens Panel
- Moat Care & Repair
- Age Concern
- Kent Social Services, Occupational Therapy and Sensory Disabilities Bureau
- Sevenoaks District Council Landlord's Forum
- Southern Private Landlords Association
- Community Development Team, Sevenoaks District Council

### **24. Cases which fall outside the Council's policy**

It is accepted that there will inevitably be some cases that fall outside the scope of this policy document. Such cases, together with others that may exhibit special extenuating circumstances will be reported for consideration by the Cabinet Member for Social and Housing Services

### **25. Appeals**

In the absence of the Head of Housing, decisions relating to grant funding will be considered by the Community Services Director. Appeals against decisions concerning grant funding will be considered by the Council's Community Services Director or Chief Executive as appropriate.

All appeals must be submitted in writing to: -

Community Services Director

Sevenoaks District Council  
Council Offices  
Argyle Road  
Sevenoaks TN13 1HG

The Council seeks to acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 3 working days and to formally respond within 15 working days. In some cases, it may be considered necessary to discuss the case with the appellant in which case the written notification of the result of the appeal will be issued within 5 working days of the meeting.

## 26. Complaints

In the first instance, complaints should be made, in writing, to: -

Head of Housing  
Community Services Department  
Sevenoaks District Council  
Argyle Road  
Sevenoaks TN13 1HG

Every effort will be made to address complaints speedily and efficiently. The Council does have a formal complaint procedure, full details of which are available upon request.

## 27. Future policy review

This policy shall be the subject of a review during January 2004 and amendments made to take into account experiences during the transition period and comments made by applicants, service users and external partners. The policy will then be periodically reviewed to reflect changes in budget, strategic objectives and initiatives. It is anticipated that the policy will be reviewed on an annual basis thereafter.

The Council intends to publish the grant processing performance indicators on the Council's website and within "In shape" (the Council's newsletter) on an annual basis.

## 28. Publication of the renewal policy

The Council intends to promote the renewal policy via the website. Copies of the policy will be available (free of charge) from the Private Sector Housing Team and a copy will be available for inspection at the District Council's offices in Sevenoaks, Edenbridge and Swanley. A summary document will be available upon request. Copies of the policy will also be available through Citizen's Advice Bureau, Shelter (Sevenoaks) and public libraries in Sevenoaks, Edenbridge and Swanley.

## 29. Contact details:

**Private Sector Housing Team**  
**Sevenoaks District Council**  
**Community Services Department**  
**Council Offices**  
**Argyle Road**  
**Sevenoaks**  
**TN13 1HG**  
Tel 01732 227259/7312  
Fax 01732 742339  
Email [privatesectorhousing@sevenoaks.gov.uk](mailto:privatesectorhousing@sevenoaks.gov.uk)

**Moat Care & Repair**  
**1<sup>st</sup> floor**  
**96 High Street**  
**Sevenoaks**  
**TN13 1LP**  
  
Tel 01732 746835

**Kent Energy Centre**  
Tel 0800 358 6669  
[www.kentenergycentre.org.uk](http://www.kentenergycentre.org.uk)

### **Appendix 6 – Homelessness Strategy**

Full copy of the Homelessness Strategy and Review available from Social Housing Team Leader (01732) 227296

### **Appendix 7 – Empty Homes Strategy**

Under development - Contact Empty Property Officer (01732) 227000 for details of draft strategy.

## Appendix 8 – Progress on previous targets

In the previous Housing Strategy there were several targets set for services linked to the objectives in place at the time. These are reported on below:

Target - Achieve the programmed expenditure on priority projects and schemes from the Capital Programme during each financial year. The amount spent has increased. Most of the under spend is due to being unable to find a site for temporary accommodation. In 2002/03 of the sites we allocated funding for two were delayed because of section 106 issues.

	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004
Forecast Expenditure	8,707,000	4,681,000	4,338,000	7,475,000	900,000
Actual Expenditure	6,202,000	3,397,000	3,662,000	5,839,000	
Percentage spent	71%	73%	84%	78%	

Target - Reduce the length of stay in Bed and Breakfast. The average stay has increased over recent years despite the efforts made to deliver alternatives. The length of stay in 2002 reduced and this trend is continuing in 2003

	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/02	2002/03
Average length of stay in bed and breakfast	6 weeks	8 weeks	11 weeks	12 weeks	10 weeks

Target - Increase the proportion of grant applications progressed to grant offer stage within local performance indicator targets, in particular for Disabled Facilities Grants. Now the Private Sector Housing Team is fully staffed there has been a dramatic improvement in the progressing of grant applications for Disabled Facility Grants and in most other areas.

	% progressed in target time 2000/01	% progressed in target time 2001/02	% progressed in target time in 2002/03	Target Time
Disabled Facilities Grant	17%	12%	78.3%	4 weeks
Renovation Grant (Owner)	67%	40%	36.2%	8 weeks
Renovation Grant (Landlord)	100%	40%	100%	13 weeks
Home Repair Assistance	71%	50%	75.0%	4 weeks

Target - Increase the take up of Warm front Grants – Target exceeded

	2000/2001 Take up	2001/2002 Take up	2002/2002 Take up	Annual Target
Number of grants	54	120	191	150

Target - Increase the number of Home Energy Survey Checks - Target exceeded

	Jan 2000 – March 2001 completed	2001/2002 completed	2002/2003 completed	Annual Target
Number of checks	113	3149	1566	1000

Target - Enable the provision of a direct access hostel for rough sleepers and single homeless people with medium to high support needs by August 2002.

This target has now been achieved with the opening of Colebrook Road in the summer of 2002 for residents. Colebrook Road is a short stay hostel open throughout the year providing support for rough sleepers and single homeless people with medium to high support needs.

Target - Undertake a Best Value review of all housing services in 2002/03 and develop an implementation plan for identified improvements.

The Social Housing Team completed its Best Value review in Spring 2003 four key areas were included housing advice, homelessness, housing register and housing strategy and enabling.

The Private Sector Housing Team is currently undertaking its Best Value review, which is set to be completed by Autumn 2003. The key areas are grants and enforcement, homes in multiple occupation, mobile homes, Gypsies and Travellers and energy conservation

Target - Undertake a review of housing services to determine those that can be delivered electronically and implement electronic service delivery by 2005. Website is currently being updated.

The website was launched in the summer of 2002 it includes detailed information on the housing service including the housing strategy. The website has been recognised by the SOCITM as one of the most improved websites in 2003.

The housing service has taken part in a comprehensive analysis of electronic service delivery, which exceeds the requirements of BVPI 157. This has enabled us to have a clear understanding of the way we deliver our services and to work towards the national target of providing all e-deliverable services electronically by 2005.

## **Appendix 9 – Website list**

The following websites contain information that has been used in this Housing Strategy or that may be of interest:

The Council's website [www.sevenoaks.gov.uk](http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk)

Kent County Council [www.kent.gov.uk](http://www.kent.gov.uk)

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)

Government Office South East [www.go-se.gov.uk](http://www.go-se.gov.uk)

The Housing Corporation [www.housingcorp.gov.uk](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk)

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister - Supporting People [www.spkweb.org.uk](http://www.spkweb.org.uk)

The National Housing Federation [www.housing.org.uk](http://www.housing.org.uk)

The Chartered Institute of Housing [www.cih.org.uk](http://www.cih.org.uk)

Kent Rural Community Council [www.kentrcc.org.uk](http://www.kentrcc.org.uk)

Southern Private Landlords Association [www.spla.co.uk](http://www.spla.co.uk)

### Housing Providers

West Kent Housing Association [www.wkha.org.uk](http://www.wkha.org.uk)

Moat Housing Association [www.moat.co.uk](http://www.moat.co.uk)

North British Housing Association [www.placesforpeople.co.uk](http://www.placesforpeople.co.uk)

Rockdale Housing Association [www.rockdale.org.uk](http://www.rockdale.org.uk)

Orbit Housing Association [www.orbit.org.uk](http://www.orbit.org.uk)

Rural Housing Trust [www.ruralhousing.org.uk](http://www.ruralhousing.org.uk)

Dartford, Swanley and Gravesham Mind [www.dgsmind.freereserve.co.uk](http://www.dgsmind.freereserve.co.uk)

### Housing Advice

Shelter [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

Citizens Advice [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

Community Legal Service [www.justask.org.uk](http://www.justask.org.uk)

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[www.sevenoaks.gov.uk](http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk)

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