

Hart's Housing Strategy 2015-2020

“Helping local people find housing solutions”

January 2015



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Foreword by Cabinet Member for Housing

Access to good quality, affordable and settled housing is crucial. It provides the foundations on which people build their lives. It is fundamental for the quality of life of our residents.

Decent and affordable housing contributes to improving the health and wellbeing of our local communities. We are committed to delivering high quality housing services, in partnership, that meet local need.


This strategy sets out the Council's vision in this context. It has been developed in partnership and following a robust review of housing and related pressures in the district.

During the life of this strategy we can expect to face many challenges. Creative and innovative responses will be required if we are going to manage demand effectively. We have identified 4 overarching priorities that will underpin our plans. These are to:

1. Make the most of development opportunities,
2. Help local people to find their own housing solutions,
3. Make the best use of existing housing; and
4. Create sustainable homes and communities.

This five year Housing Strategy sets out how we will meet these priorities and identifies a work plan that will be delivered in partnership.

We will strengthen our existing relationships with partners by working collaboratively. By working together we can make a real difference to people's lives.



David Neighbour
Cabinet Member for Housing

Foreword by the Joint Chief Executive

This strategy is broad in scope, encompassing a wide range of the Council's housing related services and partnerships. It sets out a 5 year plan and explains how we will respond to housing need.

Meeting housing need is complex. There are many and varied drivers that contribute to housing demand. No organisation can deliver the overarching priorities outlined in this strategy in isolation.

This Housing Strategy for Hart has the support of our wider services and the full support of Hart's corporate leadership team. We are committed to working in partnership so that these affordable housing objectives for the district can be met.

Handwritten signatures of Patricia Hughes and Daryl Phillips. The signature on the left is a stylized cursive 'PH' for Patricia Hughes. The signature on the right is 'DPhillips' with a horizontal line underneath.

Patricia Hughes & Daryl Phillips
Joint Chief Executive

Key features of the district

- Hart is a largely rural district situated in North Hampshire with a population of 92,200, with approximately 9% being from black and minority ethnic (BME) households.
- Around half the population lives within the two main urban areas of Fleet (population of around 32,000) and Yateley (population around 21,000).
- Housing affordability is a real issue for many people as the average house price in Hart has increased from £292,000 in 2008 to £371,000 in 2013 (DCLG Housing Statistics 2003-2012: Land Registry 2013). This is a 32% increase compared to an 18% increase across the South East as a whole.
- The strongest growth in the population over the last decade has been amongst the older population (aged 65+). This is projected to continue increasing by approximately 24% by 2021 (SHMA 2014).

Introduction

The Hart Housing Strategy 2015-2020 sets out the actions that the Council and its partners will take to meet housing need. It will also focus on how local services can contribute to meeting the housing aspirations and objectives of local residents. It updates and replaces the 2011-2014 Strategy.

This new Housing Strategy for the district has been borne out of a period of change, including unprecedented austerity and major reform to the way we plan for, and develop, housing solutions for local communities.

It has been developed in anticipation of further change. Change to the way we deliver housing services, and changes to the way local and central government work together to build and develop sustainable communities.

With a general election next year, the Council's Housing Service will keep strategic plans under review and ensure they keep pace with any new national agenda or policy initiatives introduced by central government.

In the meantime, this strategy sets out how the Council will continue to drive positive change that will deliver continuous improvement, in partnership, to the Housing Services we provide for our residents.

A Strategic Framework

The Housing Strategy is an overarching strategic document that draws together all aspects of the Housing Service. With the exception of the Council's Preventing Homelessness Strategy, all areas of strategic housing operations and plans are brought together in this strategy. This includes our work with the private sector, rural housing, the provision of aids and adaptations, private sector housing, older persons housing and through the enabling of new housing supply more broadly. Through the policy context, evidence base and consultation with partners and residents the following 4 key objectives have been identified.

Objective 1:	Making the most of development opportunities
Objective 2:	Helping local people to find their own housing solutions
Objective 3:	Making the best use of existing housing
Objective 4:	Creating sustainable homes and communities

Tenancy Strategy

Like all local authorities in England, Hart District Council is required to have a Tenancy Strategy. The Tenancy Strategy for Hart outlines the Council's position with regard to social housing reforms that were introduced by the Localism Act 2011. The Localism Act created a new type of tenancy and gave Registered Providers the option to offer fixed term tenancies to people entering social housing. This came in to force on 1st April 2012. The new flexible tenure provides shorter tenancies so that households who are able to move on to other housing options can be encouraged to do so. This then frees up social housing for households in most need.

In 2011, central government introduced the new "Affordable Rent model". This change to the social housing framework did not require legislation and was introduced in a framework document published by the Homes and Communities Agency in February 2011. Registered Providers are encouraged to set rents at up to 80% of the market rent. This is a departure from the historically set 'social' rents that were significantly lower. The Affordable Rent model poses challenges for meeting locally assessed housing need in high cost housing market areas, with particular impacts on larger households requiring larger family homes.

The annual update of the Council's Tenancy Strategy was completed in 2014 and has been attached as an appendix to the Housing Strategy.

Policy context

Since the general election in May 2010, and during the life of the outgoing Housing Strategy, there have been significant changes to both the statutory and broader policy framework within which Housing Services are being delivered across the country.

The development of this Housing Strategy for Hart has considered the following:

- The national deficit reduction programme, including reduced public spending, welfare reform and the effects on local services and residents in Hart
- The government Housing Strategy, “Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England 2011”
- The government’s “National Planning Policy Framework”
- Part 7 of the Localism Act 2011 and associated statutory guidance
- The government reports on homelessness, “No Second Night Out: Vision to End Rough Sleeping” and “Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness”
- The Energy Act 2011

Locally, this Housing Strategy has been developed with regard to:

- Hart’s Corporate Plan 2014 to 2017
- Hart’s Sustainable Communities Strategy 2008 to 2018
- Hart’s Review of Homelessness and Housing Strategy Evidence Base 2014
- All outgoing housing related strategies for the district
- Hart’s Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2014-2017
- Hart’s Allocations Policy
- Hart’s Health and Wellbeing Partnership Strategy
- Hampshire County Council’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013-18

Key messages from the combination of national and local policy are:

- Increase the number of houses available to rent and buy, including delivering more affordable housing with less capital subsidy from government
- Make better use of the existing housing stock
- Create good quality neighbourhoods and places where people want to live
- Protect vulnerable and disadvantaged people, by tackling homelessness
- Make sure homes are of high quality and sustainable
- Ensure that decisions about housing are taken by local communities
- Improve the flexibility of social housing and promote home ownership options
- Support people to help them stay in their homes
- Help individuals to take responsibility for meeting their own and their families’ housing need
- Simplify the benefit system and create incentives to work

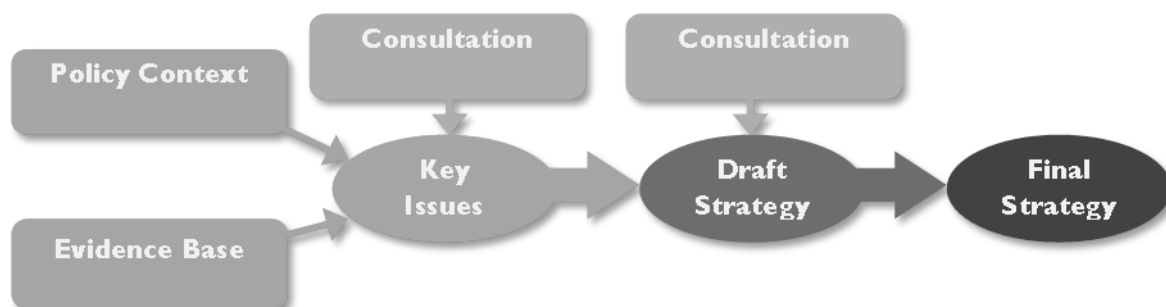
Achievements of the outgoing Housing Strategy 2011–2014

- Delivered a total of 321 affordable homes across the district
- Delivered our first shared ownership properties for the over 55's
- Delivered our first Extra Care Housing Scheme - Campbell Close providing 73 flats
- Delivered a new Sheltered Housing Scheme - Curtis Court providing 27 flats
- Delivered a rural exception housing scheme
- Developed a new and robust process through which to assess developer viability challenges on new sites
- Conducted over 1,700 Housing Options interviews and prevented homelessness for nearly 1,300 households
- Sustained low levels of statutory homelessness, rough sleeping and temporary accommodation
- Undertook the first Diagnostic Peer Review of a front line housing service anywhere in the country
- Supported 6 households to access the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- Introduced a new Allocations Policy
- Insulated 21 mobile homes using split funding from the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the Council's Minor Works Budget
- Worked in partnership with 'Insulate Hampshire' resulting in 1,470 measures being installed in Hart properties
- Delivered 267 disabled facilities grants to provide adaptations for Hart residents



Consultation

This strategy has been produced in consultation with local stakeholders and partner organisations. In addition to focus groups, a Homelessness Forum, and steering groups, the annual Housing Forum provided the opportunity for partners and stakeholders to give feedback on the Housing Service and share views about improvements and the future direction of the service. We have also consulted service users and disseminated online surveys to partners and stakeholders. The feedback has helped inform the strategic objectives and actions included in the strategy.



Objective 1: Making the most of development opportunities

Providing suitable affordable housing that meets the needs of all local residents is a priority for the Council. This is more relevant than ever considering the wide ranging reforms that have been introduced to the national housing, planning and welfare systems in recent years, and the growing challenge of a significantly ageing population.

The Housing Strategy will ensure that local housing need is assessed and informs the development of affordable housing in the district. Making the best use of the planning system is essential to providing housing that meets local needs.

A Local Plan that delivers for Hart

The Council is preparing a Local Plan to provide a framework for planning in the district. Initial consultation took place in 2014 and a draft plan will be available for consultation in 2015. Led by the Planning Policy team, the Local Plan will ensure that there is an adequate supply of housing development land, and will encourage landowners to bring land forward for development. It will set out overall housing growth numbers as well as policies to deliver affordable housing through developer contributions and rural exception housing.

Developments of any kind will impact on the communities within which they take place. When considering development, it is therefore important for the Council to recognise the need to balance priorities identified by the community such as infrastructure, education and landscape. This is to ensure that developments are appropriate and add value to the local area. Sites which meet the threshold of the Council's Affordable Housing Policy may be subject to a viability appraisal to ensure provision of affordable housing is maximised.

	Action	Intended Outcome
I.1	Contribute to the Local Plan process	The Local Plan reflects the housing needs of the district in its scope
I.2	Ensure provision of affordable housing is maximised subject to viability on new sites	Every opportunity to meet housing need and bring benefit to the district is taken
I.3	Undertake viability assessments where 40% affordable housing is not offered	Developer viability challenges are met robustly through expert scrutiny and the % of affordable housing on site is maximised in all cases
I.4	Update affordable housing policies as part of the Local Plan process	Policies reflect affordable housing need, current requirements and put in place mechanisms to meet this need

Housing and planning policies that respond to housing need

The Council has a number of mechanisms to enable it to define and measure housing need:

- **A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)**

This was commissioned jointly with Rushmoor Borough Council and Surrey Heath Borough Council and will be completed in the autumn 2014. The SHMA will provide us with an evidence base that has assessed the requirement for affordable and market housing in Hart. This evidence will be used to inform our Housing Strategy and in turn our development programme over the next four years.

[Please note the SHMA is currently being updated. This section will be updated once the SHMA is published to include the key relevant conclusions for affordable housing arising from the SHMA.]

- **Data captured by the Housing Register**

Data held on the Council's Housing Register is used to support the development and enabling process, including supporting the Housing Service to ensure new affordable housing meets an identified need. The composition of the Housing Register is a useful indicator of the type and mix of properties the district may require in future. The Council implemented a new Allocations Policy in October 2014 that determines the way the Housing Register operates. This new policy forms part of a holistic Housing Options approach that assists residents to access housing solutions equitably and by prioritising those in the greatest need for affordable housing.

When determining the number of new houses required in the district as part of its Local Plan, the Council must consider the need for additional housing alongside environmental and infrastructure constraints. The Housing Service will continue to monitor and assess housing need in Hart to support the Council to align development aims with local need.

Between 2011 and 2014, a total of 321 affordable homes were delivered. This exceeded the Council's corporate target to provide 80 affordable homes per year. The Council has decided to continue this commitment and the latest Corporate Plan sets a target for the delivery of 300 units of affordable housing between 2014 and 2017.

Action		Intended Outcome
1.5	Deliver 450 affordable homes between 2015 and 2020	An adequate supply, given local constraints, of affordable homes is built to help meet local housing need
1.6	Deliver a mix of affordable housing in Hart in line with Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and housing policy recommendations	Mix of affordable housing meets need identified in the SHMA and Hart's housing policies

Funding arrangements that work locally

The Department for Communities and Local Government & Homes and Communities Agency ‘Affordable Homes Programme 2015-18’ was launched in February 2014. This Programme provides public funding in the form of grants to enable Registered Providers working in Hart to deliver new affordable housing.

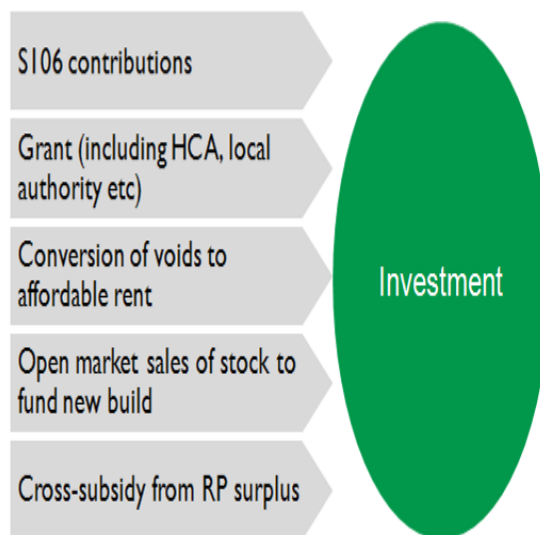


Homes & Communities Agency

The 2015–18 funding programme comprised of £1.7bn outside London. Overall this is a reduction from funding levels in previous years. This is expected to impact on the ability of Registered Providers (RPs) to deliver new affordable housing. In order to address this, the Government has enabled RPs to create properties at a new rent level. The new ‘Affordable Rent’ recommends that rents are set at a maximum 80% of local market rents. This is intended to generate an increased rental stream for RPs and reduce the level of capital subsidy required. The Council’s approach to the new rent measures is addressed in Hart’s Tenancy Strategy in more detail.

The Council will continue to work closely with RPs in the district to deliver the Tenancy Strategy. In a high cost housing market (such as Hart), the Affordable Rent model creates affordability challenges that will need to be addressed during the life of this strategy.

Changes to the availability of grant funding and the new landscape within which RPs are operating may mean that preferred partners make changes to their approach to new housing delivery. The Housing Service will work with RP partners to ensure they are contributing to meeting locally identified housing need, and to ensure that where flexible tenancies are ending, comprehensive end of tenancy options are available from RPs.



Changes to the availability of grant funding and the new landscape within which RPs are operating may mean that preferred partners make changes to their approach to new housing delivery. The Housing Service will work with RP partners to ensure they are contributing to meeting locally identified housing need, and to ensure that where flexible tenancies are ending, comprehensive end of tenancy options are available from RPs.

The Council will continue to work with neighbouring local authorities to maximise opportunities to provide affordable housing across the wider housing market area.

Action		Intended Outcome
1.7	Review the Tenancy Strategy for the district	Local tenancies align with the Council’s priorities, work within the new funding regime and RPs corporate aims, and deliver settled housing solutions that are affordable
1.8	Lever investment into the district to secure affordable housing delivery	Funding opportunities to provide affordable homes in Hart are maximised

	Action	Intended Outcome
1.9	Work with neighbouring authorities to maximise cross border opportunities to provide affordable housing	Increased choice and availability of affordable housing in the housing market area to help meet local housing need

An appropriate range of affordable housing to meet local need

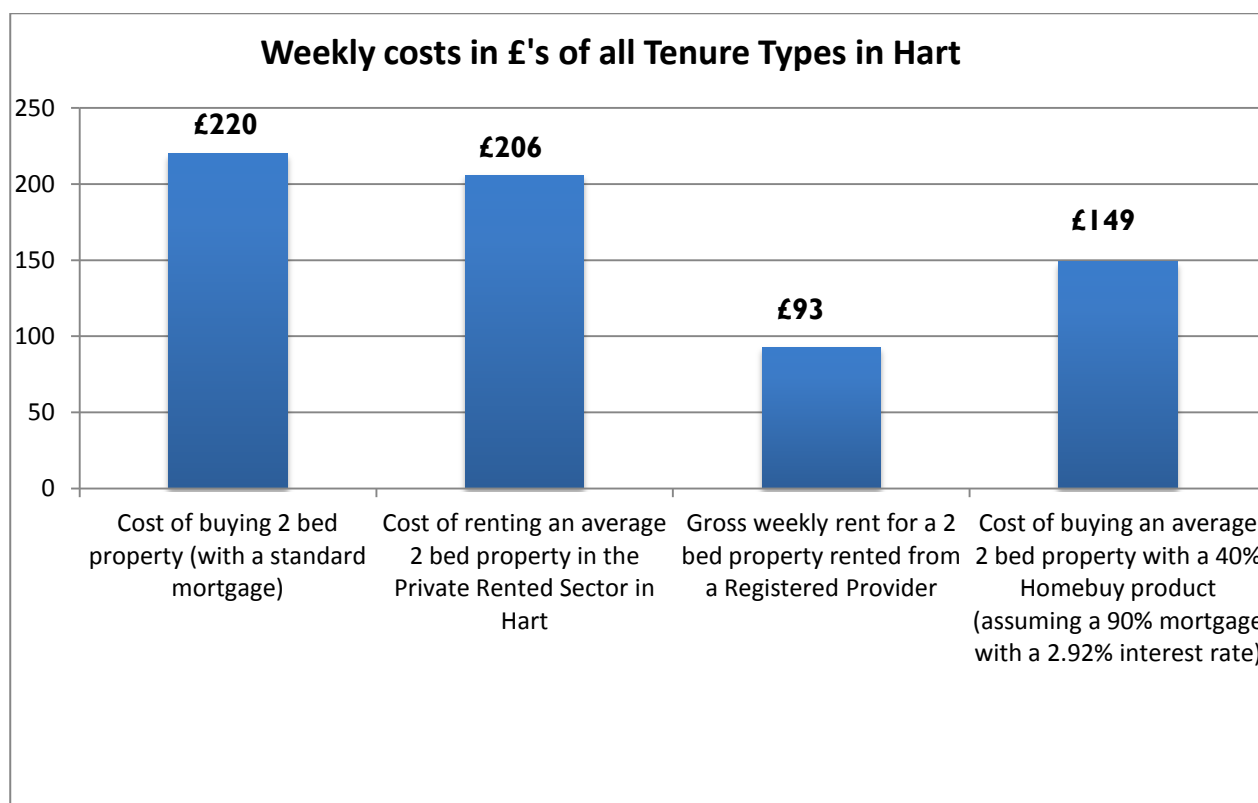
The most recent SHMA confirmed that over the past 10 years there has been a significant change in tenure with more households entering the private rented sector than home ownership or social housing. This may be due to:

- Reduction in social housing over the past 30 years
- House prices have increased at a higher rate than earnings and household incomes resulting in many households being unable to afford a mortgage
- Changes to the lending industry introduced as a result of the recent recession and more recently as part of the Mortgage Market Review 2014

Affordability

Data taken from the DCLG Housing Statistics 2003-2012; Land Registry shows that over the past 5 years house prices in Hart have increased on average by £78,800 (32%). This is higher than the average across the South East as a whole which has increased by £36,900 (18%).

The information below gives an indication of the costs of all tenure types:



Due to the high cost of both renting and owning a property in Hart it is vital that the Council provides a range of affordable housing in the district. The Affordable Rent model poses challenges due to the high costs associated with market housing in this area. 80% of a high market rent risks precluding all larger households from being able to access affordable housing in the district. High house prices also impact on the affordability of intermediate HomeBuy products.

Action		Intended Outcome
1.10	Provide a range of affordable housing products	Increased choice and availability of affordable housing for Hart residents
1.11	Monitor the affordability of products and provide guidance about this to Registered Providers	Affordable housing is affordable, particularly larger homes with 3 and 4 bedrooms

An Ageing Population

As at July 2014, there were 2,022 households registered on the Hart Housing Register, of which 13% (269) were aged 65 or over. Households in Hart include a greater proportion of people aged 65 and over than the national picture may otherwise suggest. This equates to 35.2% in Hart compared to 24.4% of households nationally.

The SHMA found that the older population in Hart has increased by 41% over the last decade with the highest increase among people aged 65+. This increase is projected to continue growing by 24% over the next decade.

When people become older, their housing needs often change. They may also develop higher support needs. Currently there are 1,134 people (6.6% of residents) in Hart suffering from dementia. This is projected to increase to 1,355 by 2020 (Hometrack).

The SHMA identifies a number of implications for housing as a result of an ageing population. These will be addressed within the Housing Strategy Action Plan. Over the next four years we aim to provide a mix of affordable rented, shared ownership, adapted homes and specialist older person’s accommodation.

Action		Intended Outcome
1.12	Provide a range of good quality affordable housing options for older people	Increased choice and availability of affordable housing in Hart to meet the older population’s requirements
1.13	Consult with older people to help inform what type of affordable housing should be developed over the next 5 years	Older person’s housing is suitable for their needs whilst taking into account their aspirations wherever possible

Housing Need

The strategy has already highlighted the importance of the Hart Housing Register in providing an up to date picture of housing need within the district. The Housing Register includes applications from households seeking affordable rented housing, plus applications from existing Registered Provider tenants wanting to transfer to alternative affordable rented homes. In July 2014, 8% of the 2,022 households registered on the Housing Register were existing Registered Provider tenants wishing to transfer to alternative housing.

Housing Register data has been analysed as part of the Review of Homelessness and Housing Strategy Evidence Base 2014. The evidence base explains emerging requirements for each household group represented on the waiting list. There is an identifiable need for further provision across all property sizes, based on the range of different households registered for housing.

	Action	Intended Outcome
1.14	Ensure new affordable housing reflects identified need and provides a range of affordable housing options	New affordable housing meets the needs of people on the Housing Register

Objective 2: Helping local people to find their own housing solutions

The Council has a legal duty to provide good quality housing advice that enables people to make informed choices about their housing options, empowering them to help themselves.

A service that prevents homelessness and provides quality advice

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires the Council to review the level of homelessness in the area and to set out an associated strategy for effectively preventing and tackling homelessness.

The Council’s Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2014-2017 is available to download at www.hart.gov.uk. It sets out the Council’s strategic plans, working in partnership, to enable people to find housing solutions, to prevent and tackle homelessness, and to ensure the Council provides high quality housing advice.



The Localism Act 2011 includes a requirement for local authorities to have regard to their Allocations Policy and Tenancy Strategy when producing their Preventing Homelessness Strategy (and vice versa). These 3 local strategic policy approaches are intrinsically linked, and set out how the Council will prevent homelessness and provide quality advice to enable people to find their own housing solutions.

This approach has been complemented by the Council’s decision to adopt the Localism Act power to end the main homelessness duty with a compulsory offer of Private Rented Sector accommodation. The Housing Service explores all available options to prevent and alleviate homelessness in all cases, and strives to meet the needs of people presenting for advice and support. The Council will continue to work closely with local Private Rented Sector landlords as well as with Registered Providers to meet housing demand.

In that context, making a homelessness application and moving in to temporary accommodation no longer provides any guarantee of an offer of social housing in Hart. The full range of options will be explored in every case. The new Allocations Policy and the Preventing Homelessness Strategy consolidate this approach.

Action		Intended Outcome
2.1	Build on existing services	The service is able to meet demand, providing quality advice and support that prevents homelessness
2.2	Support people to stay in their own homes wherever it is appropriate to do so	Minimised levels of homelessness and temporary accommodation locally
2.3	Support people to access suitable alternative accommodation when it is required	Good quality alternative housing options are available for Hart residents when needed to meet demand
2.4	Develop holistic responses that prevent homelessness & provide positive opportunities for vulnerable residents	Vulnerable residents at risk of homelessness are supported holistically (including access to education, training and employment opportunities)
2.5	Build and maintain strong working relationships across partnerships	Local Services working together and contributing to preventing and tackling homelessness in partnership
2.6	Support a successful welfare reform transition for the Hart community	Homelessness does not increase in Hart during the transition to Universal Credit

A housing allocation system that is transparent and simple to understand

The Council manages and administers the Housing Register on behalf of the district. The Housing Register determines access to Registered Provider properties in Hart. In October 2014, a new Allocations Policy was implemented. This introduced new qualifying criterion and reduced the number of priority bands. The new system assigns priority to individual households within a four level priority banding system. Priority is determined by assessed levels of housing need.

This new scheme of allocations will be monitored regularly and reviewed in consultation with service users to ensure that it is meeting the right balance of priorities for Hart.

Action		Intended Outcome
2.7	Monitor the impact of the new Allocations Policy	The new system is transparent, simple to understand and under continuous review to ensure it meets the needs of Housing Register applicants wherever possible.

A range of housing tenures that promote a flexible, affordable housing market

Housing affordability is a real issue for many people, with house prices and private rents in Hart being higher than most of the South East. The Council has a vital role to play in providing information and advice to prevent people becoming homeless and to find the best housing solution for them. It will assess the impact affordability has on people’s housing choices in the district and aim to address identified needs. The issue of affordability is complex when considering income, savings, current equity levels as well as sale and/or rental prices. The Council must understand the local position in order to meet the needs of its local communities.



The Housing Service will work with local housing providers and landlords to identify affordable housing solutions for local people.

Action		Intended Outcome
2.8	Assess the impact affordability has on all types of households in Hart, irrespective of whether they are living in rented or owner occupied property, including their housing options.	The Council understands local affordability in relation to housing need and is able to advise households on the options available to them

A rural policy that understands the needs of the district

Rural areas of Hart are often the most expensive to live in. It is important to assess the need for rural affordable housing and to ensure rural communities are sustainable. This can be achieved, in part, by enabling people with a local connection to remain in their village.



Rented accommodation in rural areas is highly sought after. Rents are often significantly more expensive than neighbouring urban areas. There is very limited availability of smaller accommodation for single persons or couples. This often results in villagers having to relocate to an alternative town where properties are more accessible and rent levels are more affordable.

The Council has a number of mechanisms in place to enable it to define and measure housing need in rural areas by analysing information held on the Housing Register and commissioning Rural Housing Needs Surveys. These ensure that development proposals are aligned with local need and priorities.

This evidence should not, however, be looked at in isolation. Proposals for development will need to consider other local priorities such as infrastructure, to ensure a balanced, well integrated enhancement to the local community.

The Council is part of a partnership called Hampshire Alliance for Affordable Housing (HARAH) and will continue to work closely with Rural Housing Enablers and Parish Councils to address how rural housing need can best be met. The HARAH partnership funds two Rural Housing Enablers who work closely with Parish Councils and local communities to advocate local priorities and support them in meeting their local need. More information about HARAH can be found on the HARAH website www.harrah.org.uk.

Action		Intended Outcome
2.9	Continue the Council’s commitment to the Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH)	The Council continues to support Parishes and local communities in an effective and efficient way to identify and address their housing needs
2.10	Continue to encourage Rural Exception Sites with Local Parishes	The Council continues to support Rural Housing Enablers and encourage Parish’s to undertake Housing Needs Surveys to identify where development may be needed

An inclusive service that meets the needs of local communities

The Council will ensure that the specific needs of marginal groups such as young people, people with support needs, BME groups (including Travellers) are identified and addressed. It is important to develop accessible services to enable these groups to make informed decisions about their housing and enable them to find housing solutions. There may also be a requirement for specialised accommodation or Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to help some of these groups live independently. With an increasingly older population in Hart, demand for DFGs is likely to increase.

Action		Intended Outcome
2.11	Assess the needs of people with support needs including learning difficulties and physical disabilities	Suitable accommodation and tenure that meets the needs of marginal groups is available to those requiring it
2.12	Work with Hampshire County Council’s Adult Services to determine potential negative impacts of any future remodelling of support services (Supporting People) for vulnerable groups	The Council is clear about the future of Supporting People funded services and able to identify residents who will be affected by future changes

Action		Intended Outcome
2.13	Work with Hampshire County Council on the existing provision of Traveller permanent sites	The Council is clear about the future of the sites in the district and how to meet the needs of this group
2.14	Plan for and assess the future need for permanent, transit and settled Traveller accommodation	The Council has clear information about the need for these types of sites to be able to plan actions

Provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to people who need adaptations

DFGs are mandatory grants payable to older or disabled people who need adaptations to their homes. With an ageing population and greater life expectancy of children with disabilities, the demand for DFGs is expected to rise.

The most recent stock condition survey identified a potential £3.5m worth of adaptation works over the five year period between 2010 and 2015. Based on historical spend which has been significantly lower, this is further evidence suggesting demand for DFGs will continue to rise.

Low cost works to provide minor adaptations offer a cost effective way of enabling older and disabled people to continue to live independently, making their homes safe, secure and convenient to use, while reducing health and social care costs.

The Council is working on a number of initiatives to reduce high value DFG costs. These include procurement with other authorities in Hampshire to bulk purchase level access showers to reduce the price per unit, and helping grant applicants to consider alternative housing options that may be more appropriate to meet their needs.

Hart continues to work with Occupational Therapists and the Home Improvement Agency to deliver DFGs. Customer Satisfaction Surveys of DFG customers ensure that the customer experience is being monitored and high levels of satisfaction are maintained.

The way that government funding for DFGs is disseminated is changing. In the June 2013 Spending Review the government announced a pooled Integration Transformation Fund intended to enable the NHS and local authorities to jointly commission health and social care services. From 2015-16 DFG funding will be un-ring fenced and part of the Integration Transformation Fund. This means that DFG funding will be paid to Hampshire County Council, while the districts will retain statutory responsibility for delivering DFGs. In 2015-16, Hampshire County Council will allocate Hart's budget reflecting our existing allocation. Beyond that, the picture is currently uncertain. In future, Hart may be expected to evidence the level of funding we require.

Action		Intended Outcome
2.15	Efficiently deliver mandatory DFGs to older and vulnerable people	At least 60 DFGs delivered annually to older and vulnerable people to meet need
2.16	Reduce the costs associated with high value DFGs	Costs are reduced through improved procurement
2.17	Help grant applicants to consider alternative housing options instead of high value DFGs	Residents eligible for high cost DFGs are actively considering alternative housing options with support from the Housing Needs Service
2.18	Engage with the County Council in discussions about the future for DFG funding distribution in Hampshire, and monitor the impact of any decisions taken by County during the life of the strategy	Hart receives continued adequate investment in DFGs

Encourage RPs to provide aids and adaptations within their housing stock

Some Registered Providers in Hart make financial contributions to fund aids and adaptations, such as bathroom grab rails, for their tenants. Others are also paying towards larger scale works such as level access showers and will also make contributions to top up DFGs for extensions. The Council will work closely with Registered Providers to develop these services further.

Action		Intended Outcome
2.19	Work with Registered Providers to deliver low cost aids and adaptations within their housing stock.	Increase in the number of low cost aids and adaptations provided by RPs in the social rented stock

Provide a Home Improvement Agency in Hart

Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) offer advice to older, vulnerable and disabled people to help them to remain in their own home, by arranging for home improvements, repairs and adaptations to be carried out. In Hart, the HIA is provided by Family Mosaic.

The Handyperson Service, provided by Aster Living, provides a low cost minor home repair service for over 55s and disabled people. The current Handyperson contract is due to end in March 2015 following reductions in spending announced by Hampshire County Council. From March 2015 the County Council will cease part-funding the service. The Council will need to consider the future of this service from April 2015 onwards.

Action		Intended Outcome
2.20	Provide a Home Improvement service in Hart	Home improvement services are delivered
2.21	Promote the existing Handyperson Service until April 2015 and review options for the future delivery of this service.	More older and disabled people know about and have access to a Handyperson service

Objective 3: Making the best use of existing housing

Building new properties is only one factor involved in meeting housing need. Adopting an approach that combines new build with making best use of the existing housing stock helps to make the most significant impact.

Meeting the future housing needs of older people

This strategy has already highlighted that Hart has an ageing population and how the Council will seek to make the most of development opportunities to meet the housing needs of older persons. In addition to looking at development opportunities, the Housing Service will also utilise existing housing resources to deliver the most appropriate accommodation and high quality housing options advice.



Hart has worked in partnership with Sentinel Housing Association in recent years to regenerate and develop a range of existing older persons living accommodation within the district. Older style studio/bedsit accommodation, and Sentinel’s former office building in Fleet have either been redeveloped or demolished and replaced by a variety of 1 & 2 bed units for use as over 55’s, sheltered or extra care accommodation.

This Strategy has identified a number of actions to address the needs of an ageing population in Hart. The actions below demonstrate how the Council will continue to seek to make best use of existing housing stock in the context of providing homes for older people.

Action		Intended Outcome
3.1	Work with Registered Providers to continue to regenerate existing unsuitable studio sheltered accommodation into 1 and 2 bedroom apartments	Older persons housing is suitable for the future requirements of an ageing population
3.2	Hold open days at specific sheltered/extra care schemes to promote the range of accommodation and support services provided for older people	Increase awareness of available accommodation across the district and encourage downsizing

A downsizing product that meets residents’ aspirations

Hart is an affluent and attractive area, yet this brings its own housing market challenges. Housing is expensive and there is an acute demand for affordable homes. Census 2011 data demonstrates that Hart is the 3rd most under-occupied district in England and Wales, with just over half of all households in Hart having 2 or more spare rooms (ONS Census 2011).

Whilst it is positive that there are people in the area who are able to comfortably under occupy their homes, for others, large accommodation can be expensive and difficult to manage. For households experiencing housing problems such as overcrowding locally, accessing alternative suitable and affordable accommodation can be difficult.

The Housing Service is working with local affordable housing providers and developers, to identify ways to reduce under-occupation by encouraging existing residents to consider the options available to downsize.

Schemes specifically for older people have been developed over the past 3 years and there are more planned over the next 5 years and beyond. The schemes include Extra Care housing and accommodation for active older people. The aim is to provide a range of products that will appeal to older people who wish to move to a smaller and more manageable property. Whilst supporting older people to move to more appropriate accommodation, effective downsizing schemes can contribute to alleviating the demand for family homes by increasing supply.

Action		Intended Outcome
3.3	Work with housing providers to identify under-occupiers in their stock and encourage them to move to smaller homes	Provision of housing that better meets the needs of older people and makes more family sized accommodation available
3.4	Consult older persons about their downsizing requirements and research good practice to make best use of available housing stock through downsizing	Local agencies work jointly to identify requirements and provide a comprehensive downsizing package to enable people to move if they wish to do so

A District that improves the standards of its housing stock

The Council supports regeneration projects in the district. Local Registered Providers have reviewed their housing stock in Hart to assess whether it is fit for purpose in the future and where changes are required. Plans may include regeneration of accommodation that no longer meets the required standard, has become difficult to let, or disused pieces of land and garage areas that are appropriate to redevelop.

Action		Intended Outcome
3.5	Work with Registered Providers to identify stock that would benefit from redesign and redevelopment	Housing stock is improved and better meets the needs of people in the district

Improving the approach to tackling empty homes in the district

Bringing empty homes back into use can contribute to meeting housing need and making the best use of existing housing stock. Hart has one of the lowest proportions of empty homes within Hampshire but has identified that there is potential to work with a small number of property owners to bring their homes back into use. There are a number of options available that the Council could pursue to improve the approach to tackling this issue and the Housing Service is committed to exploring these options further, as well as identifying potential partners, resource implications and opportunities.

Action		Intended Outcome
3.6	Further research and review of options to inform the development of an improved approach to tackling empty homes	Increased in options available for the Council and property owners to bring empty homes back into use for Hart residents

Working with the private sector

The private sector makes up almost 90% of the total housing stock in Hart. The majority of private sector housing comprises homes in owner occupation with the remaining 10% representing private rented homes. The Council is under a legal duty to ensure that people live in safe and warm homes, and will work with private sector partners to maintain a high quality housing stock in the district.

Inspecting Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

The Housing Act 2004 includes a statutory duty for local authorities to ensure that they deal with high risk hazards. It also includes a requirement to implement licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) for properties over 2 storeys high and providing accommodation for 5 people or more. It is estimated that there are approximately 35 properties in the district that are being used as HMOs or shared houses. Although the number of HMOs in Hart is comparatively low it is important to monitor the condition of this stock. The Council uses a risk based programme for the inspection of these premises and will inspect in response to issues as they arise.

Action		Intended Outcome
3.7	Inspect all licensable HMOs and remedy all Category I hazards	HMOs in the district are safe and free from Category I hazards
3.8	Increase the number of shared houses and HMOs to meet the needs of single people	Single people under 35 are able to access accommodation in the district

Helping people to be safe and secure in their homes

The Home Improvement Agency (Family Mosaic) carry out home security checks and the Council offers Minor Works Grants for minor repairs.

The Council works closely with the Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service to improve fire safety in properties that are most at risk of fire, and promotes events and initiatives that improve fire safety in the home. These include annual electric blanket testing in partnership with Trading Standards.

Action	Intended Outcome
3.9 Support annual electric blanket testing programme	Raise awareness of fire safety

A relationship with the Private Rented Sector that provides homes to meet local need

The Council’s Housing Service works closely with Private Rented Sector (PRS) landlords and their agents to provide a comprehensive service that sets up tenancies in the right way and maintains them effectively. Landlords and letting agents working with the Council receive support and information from a number of sources. This is important to ensure the Council has a good working relationship with the sector and to provide good quality private rented homes in partnership locally.

Private Rented Sector landlords and their agents play an important role in meeting housing need in Hart and they are a key partner for the Council in securing settled accommodation solutions for our residents. Private Rented Sector landlords and letting agents were consulted as part of the Review of Homelessness and Housing Strategy Evidence Base in 2014, and the Council will continue to work with them and develop services in partnership.

More actions relating to this area of operations and further information about this service can be found in the Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2014-2017.

Action	Intended Outcome
3.10 Continue to build strong partnerships with landlords and letting agents in the Private Rented Sector	Increased choice & housing options available and a supply of PRS to support end of duty housing options for homeless households

Improving standards in the private sector housing

The Council is under a legal duty to ensure the private sector housing stock is safe and fit for purpose, and a range of powers are available to support Hart’s Private Sector Housing team to achieve this. The Council is also under a duty to ensure housing conditions in the area are kept under review.

The Council must inspect premises where it has a suspicion that there may be hazards. The last stock condition survey of the district was completed in March 2011. This indicated that the primary ‘hazard failures’ in Hart were excessive cold and risk of falling, caused by uneven surfaces and worn carpets.

Action		Intended Outcome
3.11	Continue to respond to the recommendations of the most recent stock condition survey	Primary hazards are reduced in the district and work to prevent and tackle the main causes of hazard are targeted

Providing the opportunity for everyone to live in a decent home

Hart supports the national policy ambition that everyone should have the opportunity of living in a ‘decent home’. The Decent Homes Standard comprises four broad criteria: hazards, disrepair, modern facilities and thermal comfort. 18% of homes in the district do not meet Decent Homes Standard, compared with 36% nationally.

In Hart, most failures relate to thermal comfort and insufficient energy efficiency levels. In common with the national picture, private rented homes are generally in the poorest condition. The 2011 Hart housing stock condition survey indicates that there were 1,470 vulnerable households, who are in receipt of one of the principal means-tested benefits or long-term disability benefits, living in non-decent dwellings in Hart and recommended that resources should be targeted at this group.

Action		Intended Outcome
3.12	Target assistance to vulnerable households	Vulnerable people in non-decent homes are assisted as a priority

Assessing hazards in the private sector stock

The Housing Act 2004 introduced the Housing Health and Safety Rating system (HHSRS). The HHSRS set out a standardised way to assess housing conditions and evaluate the potential risks to health and safety in residential properties. The HHSRS defines 29 ‘hazards’. If the risk of a hazard is assessed to be high, it is considered to be ‘Category 1’ and the Council has a duty to take action. Such hazards are mainly associated with older dwellings (pre-1945) and dwellings occupied by households in certain groups. This includes, for example, people on a low income, in receipt of a benefit or benefits, where the householder is aged 65 or over, and residents with a disability.

The stock condition survey indicates that 10% of all properties in Hart have Category 1 hazards under the HHSRS, representing 9% of owner occupied properties and 20% of Private Rented Sector properties. 35% of failures related to excess cold, 35% related to falls on the level and 30% related to falls on stairs. 11% of dwellings with a Category 1 hazard had two or more failures. The Council will focus on energy efficiency to tackle the lack of thermal comfort (as set out in key Objective 4), and will seek to work with the voluntary and health sectors on a ‘Falls Prevention’ programmes during the life of the strategy.

Action		Intended Outcome
3.13	Prioritise cases where Category 1 hazards are identified	Those at the greatest risk are addressed quickly
3.14	Increase awareness of falls prevention in partnership with the voluntary sector	The number of falls in the home are reduced

Providing minor works grants and low cost loans

The Council currently offers a discretionary Minor Works Grant to applicants on certain welfare benefits that can be used to fund repair and improvement work, minor adaptations, energy efficiency works and crime prevention measures. The maximum grant is £5,000.

Low cost loans provide an effective means of delivering assistance to home owners where capital is tied up in the value of their property and as an alternative to grant funding.

Since 2008, the Council has been part of the Surrey and Hampshire Improvement Partnership, working with South Coast Money Line to offer low cost secured loans, called Home Trust Loans, to home owners for essential repairs, improvement or adaptation, where they do not have the capital or savings available to carry out the work. Loans of between £1,000 and £25,000 are available, repayable over an agreed period of up to 15 years.

Action		Intended Outcome
3.15	Provide Minor Works Grants to fund minor repairs	Recipients are able to remain in their homes
3.16	Encourage greater take-up of loans to fund repairs and maintenance as an alternative to grants	Increase in number of low cost loans offered so that those without sufficient capital or savings are able to carry out essential repairs, improvements or adaptations

Objective 4: Creating sustainable homes and communities

Providing good quality homes that people want to live in, and communities that are cohesive and sustainable, whilst preserving the character of the district, are vital to the long-term vision of the Council.

Improving the energy efficiency of private sector housing

The strategy has already set out that the Stock Condition Survey in 2011 identified that one of the main reasons properties in the private sector in Hart fail the Decent Homes Standard is due to insufficient energy efficiency measures and lack of thermal comfort.

The Housing Service will therefore continue to focus on supporting local households to make their homes more energy efficient. Making energy efficiency improvements not only improves thermal comfort, but also provides the most effective way to reduce fuel poverty.

Working with partners to raise awareness of energy efficiency measures and promote the Green Deal and ECO grants

In 2013 the Government launched a carbon reduction programme called The Green Deal to encourage householders to make energy saving improvements, including the installation of renewable technologies that use natural resources such as sunlight or wind to create energy.

The Green Deal and ECO grants programme underwent a number of significant changes during 2014. Hart worked in partnership with Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council to try and harness funding for local households on low incomes to improve energy efficiency in residential homes. The focus of this work was to target free and low cost measures at those identified to be most likely to lack thermal comfort and to be affected by fuel poverty. Due to central government changes to the funding regime, however, it has become increasingly difficult to access funding for this group.

The Housing Service is reviewing its approach to delivering energy efficiency support in light of changes to the Green Deal and considering other means of assisting our residents to install energy efficiency measures in their properties.

Action		Intended Outcome
4.1	Review options to deliver a targeted programme of energy efficiency measures in local homes	No/low cost energy efficiency measures are available to vulnerable and low income households in Hart
4.2	Continue to promote Green Deal Finance and monitor new government initiatives and work with neighbouring districts to deliver local schemes that draw down future government funding	Hart residents benefit from future government initiatives to improve energy efficiency in residential homes

A development programme that delivers design to be proud of

The HCA is committed to delivering good design and sustainable development. New affordable housing developments, funded or approved by the HCA are required to meet their design standards. The HCA are also developing performance targets relating to design quality and sustainable development, based on qualitative, value-led methods with a focus on outcomes.



The Housing Service monitors customer satisfaction with new build affordable housing and new developments to better understand the experience of new tenants and how we can improve our approach to delivering affordable housing locally.

A district that reduces its carbon consumption

The Council is working with local Registered Providers to encourage energy saving initiatives for their properties. Registered Providers are monitoring energy efficiency measures in the new homes they build.

	Action	Intended Outcome
4.3	Ensure that HCA funded new builds meet HCA design and energy efficiency requirements	New schemes add positive design value to the local environment and meet sustainability aims

Local design standards that create sustainable communities

National planning guidance provides information about design principles.

Good design makes a clear and positive contribution to creating sustainable communities. It should ensure that new developments are practical and creative and create spaces and places that look good, work well and will meet needs in the future.

Local planning authorities and neighbourhood planning authorities can achieve this by having clear design policies in their plans.

Pepper potting affordable housing on new development sites is important to achieving sustainable development. The Council believes it is good practice to aim for small clusters, for example 6-10 properties, subject to viability, the views of Registered Providers and with regard to individual circumstances.

	Action	Intended Outcome
4.4	Contribute to the formation of local design policy.	To achieve a high standard of design for all housing, including affordable housing

	Action	Intended Outcome
4.5	Work with partners to develop appropriate pepper potting of affordable housing on new development sites.	To assist in developing sustainable and well designed communities

An integrated housing market that promotes community cohesion

The Council's Planning Policy encourages developers to create mixed communities by integrating affordable housing among market housing in small clusters, for all new developments requiring affordable housing. The policy also allows for rural exception housing where it is needed, (and as previously referenced in this strategy), to enable people with a local connection to the area to remain there. This contributes to creating sustainable communities.



Local Lettings Plans also help to create and develop sustainable communities. The Council will use these on appropriate housing schemes, including on new developments.

The Council anticipates that local Registered Providers will continue to adopt new forms of tenure, and to review their rent structures in light of both the Localism Act 2011 and the new Affordable Homes Programme. The Housing Service will seek to influence those changes through the local Tenancy Strategy and with ongoing strategic liaison between key partners in the delivery of affordable housing.

The district may see further diversification in the types of housing tenures and rents offered by Registered Providers locally. It is important that the Council positively influences its partners to ensure we are developing successful places where people want to live now and in the future.

	Action	Intended Outcome
4.6	Require new developments to integrate a mix of tenures	New developments become places people want to live

A quality housing management service that provides sustainable and cohesive communities

The Housing Service works closely with Registered Providers who own properties in the district to ensure that tenants receive a good quality housing management service. This is monitored through regular liaison and partnership. Hart has introduced updated arrangements for working with affordable housing providers, which requires them to demonstrate that they meet a set of minimum standards to join our approved Registered Providers list. This will be extended to all housing providers who manage stock in the district over the coming years.

Action		Intended Outcome
4.7	Monitor housing providers' services through new approved partners arrangement	Ensure that local residents receive a good quality housing management service from their provider

A Council that focuses on working with local communities

Neighbourhood planning was introduced through the Localism Act 2011 and neighbourhood planning legislation came into effect in April 2012. It is intended to shift powers from central government back to people and their communities. Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to:

- make a neighbourhood development plan
- make a neighbourhood development order
- make a Community Right to Build order

Action		Intended Outcome
4.8	Assist local communities and parishes in their efforts to meet local objectives	Local communities are enabled and empowered to take ownership of local issues
4.9	Monitor customer satisfaction with new build Registered Provider properties	New design standards reflect the aspirations of the local community

Conclusion

The Housing Strategy 2015-2020 has been developed based on a robust review of evidence and with the support of our partners. It focuses on four overarching objectives that have been developed through consultation, and that will be delivered in partnership.

The past 3 years have been a time of significant change, yet the objectives we have collectively determined represent broadly similar themes to those of the outgoing Housing Strategy. While the landscape has changed, our local priorities have not.

We anticipate ongoing change throughout the life of the strategy. We will keep our strategic plans under review to ensure they remain current and keep pace with changing times.

The actions identified herein will form a delivery plan. This will be a live document which will feed in to the Housing Service's work plan. It will contribute to the overarching corporate aims for housing set out in the Corporate Plan.

Monitoring and Review

Responsibility for driving through this strategy and ensuring that it delivers key objectives lies with the Head of Housing Services. The strategy has, however, been developed in partnership with others and we intend to involve these partners in the ongoing review and monitoring of delivery against targets and outcomes.

The delivery plan will use the SMART(ER) principles and be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Housing Service's Strategy & Development team. Additionally, progress towards the aims of the strategy will form a standing agenda item for the Hart Housing Management Forum that meets biannually.

The strategy will also be monitored by the Housing Service Board through the Housing Service Plan and through Overview & Scrutiny Committee as may be required.

In addition, every year the Housing Service holds a Housing Forum to report on the progress to partners and stakeholders. This provides an excellent opportunity for attendees to give their views and feedback which helps shape the Housing Service for the following year and enables our plans to adapt in partnership.

An annual update on progress will be produced over the life of the strategy, highlighting what has been delivered and outcomes.

Further information and contact details

If you would like more information about the Council's Housing Services, the Housing Strategy 2015-2020, or any associated housing related strategies, please contact the Housing Service using the details below:

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Glossary

Term	Meaning
Affordable housing	Affordable housing includes social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.
Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME)	BME is a grouping of ethnic groups defined by the 2001 Census classifications. It includes all ethnic groups that are a minority in the population
Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)	Disabled Facilities Grants are available in approved cases to help disabled people who need special adaptations to their home. Frequently funded works include flush floor shower rooms, ground floor bedrooms, stair-lifts, kitchen adaptations and ramps to and from the dwelling. These grants are means tested and are available to owner-occupiers, tenants and landlords including social landlords.
Fuel poverty	A household is said to be in fuel poverty if it needs to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel to maintain a satisfactory heating regime (usually 21 degrees for the main living area, and 18 degrees for other occupied rooms) Source: www.decc.gov.uk
Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH)	The Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing was formed in 2005 to address the need for affordable housing in the villages of Hampshire. The founding members of the HARAH are the Hampshire Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs), the Homes and Communities Agency and rural local authorities in Hampshire.
Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)	The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is the national housing and regeneration agency for England. Their role is to create thriving communities and affordable homes.
Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)	Housing Act 2004 introduced mandatory licensing of high risk houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) – these are HMOs of 3 storeys or more, which are occupied by 5 or more people, who form two or more households.
Intermediate tenure	Housing at prices and rents above those of social rent but below market price or rents. These can include shared equity (e.g. HomeBuy) and other low cost homes for sales, and intermediate rent.
Local Plan	"The Local Plan is a development planning framework for the area; its key elements include the spatial strategy, policies, infrastructure provision and site allocations."
Registered Provider (RP)	RP's are independent housing organisations registered with the Homes & Communities Agency. Most are housing associations, but there are also trusts, co-operatives & companies.
Rural Exception Housing	Sites adjoining rural settlements that would not normally be available for development. Planning permission is only given for affordable housing that is needed in the area.
Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)	The SMHA provides an evidence base on the future balance of housing supply. It assesses need and demand in terms of tenure, type, location and affordability.
Surrey and Hampshire Improvement Partnership (SHIP)	SHIP was formed as part of a bid to provide to extend the range of support that the Council could offer private householders this includes Fuel Poverty and Empty Homes.
Viability	A viability assessment tries to identify a reasonable percentage above the existing use value for the residual value to be attractive enough for to a landowner to bring forward their site.

Appendix I: Tenancy Strategy Annual Update 2014

The Hart Tenancy Strategy 2012 set out the Council's local priorities relating to the new options for rented tenancies, introduced by the Localism Act 2011.

Main points from the Localism Act:

- Gives Registered Providers (RPs) the option to use fixed term flexible tenancies
- A minimum fixed term of two years
- Renewable tenancies with eligibility criteria

Three local objectives have been identified for this Tenancy Strategy:

Objective 1: *Tenancies offered provide an appropriate level of security of tenure for the person*

Objective 2: *Affordable Rents deliver new housing whilst continuing to assist those on low incomes*

Objective 3: *Balance is achieved between creating flexibility in social housing and promoting settled mixed communities*

The strategy is updated and will continue to be updated on an annual basis reviewing the key local objectives. The Tenancy Strategy Action Plan has been updated and included in this document.

Objective 1: *Tenancies offered provide an appropriate level of security of tenure for the person*

In order to ensure the right tenancy is granted to the future tenant, RPs should consider our recommendations on the length and type of tenancy offered as well as their review process and grounds for non-renewal of a fixed term tenancy.

Since the Tenancy Strategy was written, some RPs operating in the district implemented Tenancy Policies. The table below shows information on length of tenancy type and the number of fixed term tenancies that have been issued since July 2012.

Currently not all RPs are using fixed term tenancies. Where fixed term tenancies are being used, however, it is clear that all RPs have generally taken into account the Council's objectives by:

- Providing residents with a fixed term tenancy for a minimum of 5 years
- Providing older residents with a lifetime tenancy (Assured Tenancy)
- Providing residents with a disability with a lifetime tenancy (Assured Tenancy)
- Providing residents with a clear review process

(Note that there are exceptions to all of the above which can be seen in each RP's Tenancy Policy)

Objective 2: Affordable Rents deliver new housing whilst continuing to assist those on low incomes

Affordable Rents have been introduced to bring additional sources of funding to the delivery of new social housing. The Council needs to ensure that whilst it provides new affordable housing it is still meeting the housing need of those on low incomes.

Affordable Rents

Provisions in the Localism Act 2011 mean that RP’s can charge up to 80% of open market rent and have fixed term and lifetime tenancies. In a high cost housing market such as Hart, affordability is a key concern. The Review of Homelessness and Housing Strategy Evidence Base 2014, and Section 6 of the Housing Strategy, provide statistical information on the continued high cost of renting properties in the district. These documents can be downloaded at www.hart.gov.uk. This data suggests that for many residents in Hart and in particular, larger families on low incomes, the new Affordable Rent levels are not always “affordable”.

Sentinel is the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer organisation (LSVT) in Hart. This means that they own and manage the former Council housing stock in Hart. They are the main provider of social housing in the district. Since 2012 they let 34 new build properties at Affordable Rent, and 53 re-let properties.

Affordable Rents: New Lets –

Some RP’s operating in the district use Affordable Rents for their new build properties in line with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Affordable Homes Programme.

The table below provides an example of Affordable Rent levels (including service charges) that one RP has been applying to different bedroom sizes of new build properties that have recently been delivered through the development process. This is to provide an understanding of the type of rents currently being charged for affordable housing in Hart.

1 bedroom	2 bedroom	3 bedroom	4 bedroom
£134.40	£165.24	£190.40	£200

The Council anticipates that these rent levels may change in the future. The Council will continue to work with the RP’s operating in the District to ensure that Affordable Rents remain truly affordable to people on the housing register.

The Council has real concerns about the affordability of larger rented homes in this area and would like to see the rent levels for the larger 4 bedroom properties capped at £200 to enable residents with large families to access suitable affordable housing. Working residents on low incomes face real difficulties in meeting the higher rental costs on a long-term basis, and the housing market in Hart is expensive when compared to some neighbouring boroughs and outstrips the levels of increase in housing costs in the South East.

The Council is reviewing available options to help it to influence the delivery of new affordable housing in the district, so that it is financially viable for those households registered on the Hart Housing Register with an assessed housing need. There is also an ongoing commitment to working in partnership with Preferred Partners to ensure that rent conversions on properties that are becoming available to re-let are affordable for households in need.

Affordable Rents: Re-lets -

The Council considers that larger properties becoming available for re-let in existing stock should remain as social rent. This recognises that the costs of delivering new larger homes may result in a smaller number of larger units being built with a higher rental value. The Council remains committed to working with RPs to ensure larger properties are affordable, and considers that rents for new 4-bedroom homes should be lower than LHA levels.

Most RPs operating in Hart are aiming to convert a certain percentage of re-let properties to Affordable Rent. As with new developments the larger homes are likely to be the less affordable properties if they are re-let at an 80% Affordable Rent.

This will continue to be closely monitored as part of this strategy. The Council will be reviewing what it considers to be appropriate rent levels for the area with regard to the income of households who are eligible to join the Housing Register.

From October 2014, the implementation of a new Allocations Policy for Hart means that the Housing Register will comprise of only those households able to demonstrate “Reasonable Preference” (“Reasonable Preference” effectively means “housing need”).

The Council will maintain an ongoing focus on affordability as it relates to larger homes for households in need, as part of a strategic commitment to providing affordable housing solutions for local residents.

Objective 3: *Balance is achieved between creating flexibility in social housing and promoting settled mixed communities*

The Council needs to continually review the impact of these changes on the district as a whole to ensure it continues to deliver on its objective to promote sustainable homes and communities.

With the exception of 5 year fixed term tenancies offered by Hyde Housing, most fixed term tenancies in Hart will last a minimum of 6 years. It will, therefore, be at least 3 further years before the impacts of new flexible tenures in Hart can be properly understood and RPs are able to provide more detailed information regarding outcomes for residents occupying RP homes under this new tenure.

The Council will continue to monitor the impacts of Affordable Rent and Flexible Tenancies on an annual basis. This will be through liaison with all RPs operating in the district.

We will work to try and ensure all forms of social housing are affordable and flexible, whilst encouraging settled and mixed communities.

Conclusion

The objectives set out in the 2012 Tenancy Strategy continue to represent the primary areas of focus for the Council’s ongoing approach to its Tenancy Strategy for the coming year.

Providing affordable homes for Hart residents remains a key priority for the Council. Partnership working will continue with RPs in Hart to ensure both new housing and existing stock is affordable for people registered on the Hart Housing Register.

With the implementation of the new Allocations Policy for Hart in October 2014, the Council hopes to improve the locally held intelligence relating to the financial capability of households in need, to inform future discussions with partners concerning rent setting.

New actions have been included in the Tenancy Strategy Action Plan Update 2014 to reflect that it is a live document and to capture additional work that the Council will be undertaking that is relevant to this strategy.

Monitoring and Review

The Delivery Plan has been reviewed and updated as part of the Tenancy Strategy Annual Update 2014.

To ensure all information required as part of the Delivery Plan is monitored a new questionnaire will be devised and distributed to RPs on an annual basis and issues associated with the Tenancy Strategy will be discussed at the bi-annual Hart Housing Management Forum.

Information provided by RPs will be used to inform the next Tenancy Strategy Update which will be produced in October 2015.

The Tenancy Strategy Action Plan is updated in the following section below.

Progress on Previous Tenancy Strategy 2012:

	Action	Intended outcome	Progress
Objective I: Tenancies offered provide an appropriate level of security of tenure for the person			
i	Ensure Registered Providers' Tenancy Policies are easily available to prospective tenants.	Those on the Housing Register are aware of the new tenancy options offered by the various providers in the district and are able to find out more should they chose to do so.	Customers are directed to the RP's website or documents where they are available. Further work needs to be carried out to obtain updated copies of each Tenancy Policy.
ii	<p>Monitor Registered Provider annual data on length and type of tenancy offered, antisocial behaviour, density on developments, income levels, rent levels, rent arrears, refusals on harder to let properties.</p> <p>Once the renewal process begins, monitor number of non-renewals and outcomes.</p>	The Council has a clear understanding of the impact the flexible tenancies are having on the district and can amend its strategic position if necessary.	<p>Information on Affordable Rents and numbers of fixed term tenancies has been provided by most RPs.</p> <p>New monitoring form to be devised and distributed annually to RPs to ensure correct information is collated.</p> <p>Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policies to be a standing agenda item on the bi-annual Housing Management Forums in 2015.</p>
iii	Ensure Registered Providers provide clear information to prospective tenants at sign-up and periodically throughout the tenancy to remind and update tenants of their current situation and what may happen in the future.	Prospective tenants (and flexible tenure tenants) are aware of their rights and potential housing costs at the outset of a tenancy and periodically from then on.	ONGOING. This will be reviewed through the Council's Preferred RP's review process.

iv	Hart District Council to work with Registered Providers to publicise to people on the Housing Register what changes to benefits and rents are taking place and how it may affect them and their housing choices.	The public are aware of tenancy security and rent levels before making decisions about their housing.	<p>ONGOING. Quarterly monitoring meetings arranged with CAB and Revs & Bens to ensure we are aware of changes to benefits that that may affect an applicant's housing choices.</p> <p>Continuous partnership working and communication with RPs to ensure the Housing Service is aware of changes to tenancy security and rent levels when are advertising properties through the Hart Homes CBL system.</p>
Objective 2: Affordable Rents deliver new housing whilst continuing to assist those on low incomes			
i	Closely monitor new and re-let properties at Affordable Rent levels offered by Registered Providers in the district.	The Council builds up an understanding of the impact of affordable rents in the area and can that may arise in an informed way.	ONGOING. Affordable Rent levels charged have been monitored and discussions take place with RPs and developers on a site by site basis for new developments.
ii	Encourage Housing Register applicants' disclosure of income details and current housing costs as part of the move to a new Allocations Policy, and work with the software provider to capture and report the information in a way that is useful and informative.	The Council understands the income and financial capability of applicants on the Housing Register and can support RPs in the area to set rents that are affordable based on the demography of housing need locally.	NEW ACTION 2014: New Allocations Policy implementation October 2014.

Objective 3: A balance is achieved between creating flexibility in social housing and promoting settled mixed communities			
i	Ensure Registered Providers consult the Council over their plans for conversions to Affordable Rent in the district.	There is a dialogue between the Council and Registered Providers to ensure that conversions take place in a managed and effective way.	ONGOING. This is monitored through the Preferred Partner liaison meetings and scrutiny
ii	Monitor Registered Provider conversions and delivery of new build Affordable Rent across the district	The Council has an overview of the changes in the mix of tenures and affordability in the district and can seek to influence future changes if necessary.	ONGOING. Affordable rent levels charged have been monitored and discussions take place with RP's and developers on a site by site basis for new developments.
iii	Review approach to s106 agreements on new developments to encourage rent levels that are affordable for households in need, specifically in terms of larger homes.	The Council has a clear perspective on Affordable Rent levels that are "affordable" for the households it is seeking to support and a transparent position on rent levels for larger homes across the district	NEW ACTION 2014: Progressing work on appropriate rent levels and with liaising with Shared Legal Services to develop the approach to S106.



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