

## 6. Maintaining and improving existing homes

### 6.1 The Decent Homes Standard (DHS)

The DHS is the minimum standard all social housing should achieve by 2010 and was introduced in February 2003 by the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as part of the Government's desire to link increased spending to better outcomes: **'to ensure that all social housing meets set standards of decency by 2010'**.

The DHS requires that a dwelling should:

- not have any 'serious hazards'
- be in a reasonable state of repair
- have adequate modern facilities (kitchens, bathrooms etc)
- provide adequate thermal comfort (heating and insulation).

### 6.2 Public sector housing

Public sector housing includes housing owned by the council and by RSLs. The table below shows the tenure in East Devon<sup>1</sup>.

Tenure	Dwellings	Percent
Owner occupied	49000	80%
Privately Rented	6000	10%
Housing Association (RSL)	1900	3%
Local Authority	4300	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>61200</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### 6.2.1 Council housing

We are the landlord of 4298 tenanted properties, 176 leasehold flats and 761 garages (as at April 2008) and have the responsibility to ensure these properties are suitably maintained and upgraded. All our homes meet the DHS, the result of many years of careful investment and a desire to provide tenants with good quality homes. (Although, in line with CLG guidance on decent homes, there are a small number of properties where we have respected tenants wishes not to undertake the work within their homes. This work will be undertaken when the property is next void.) The challenge is to ensure that all homes continue to meet and in many cases exceed the standard.

We undertake a rolling programme of in-house surveys covering all homes every five years. The stock database was validated by independent consultants for the purpose of the housing stock options appraisal project (2004/06). This work has in turn influenced our 30 year Housing Revenue Account Business Plan<sup>2</sup>.

Our HRA Business Plan has well thought out and established programmes of planned maintenance which, together with cyclical and responsive maintenance, delivered an overall spend of £4.5 million on work to tenants' homes during 2007/08. Similar amounts will be spent in 2008/09 and 2009/10. Improvements will include re-roofing, kitchen modernisation, rewiring, boiler replacement, and replacement doors. Guidance from consultants and the government model for business planning has been used to draw up these programmes.

We plan to spend £1.1 million per annum on **response repairs**. We have partnering arrangements with five contractors, operate a call centre for repairs, and a performance

<sup>1</sup> Private Sector House Condition Survey 2006, June 2007, Professional Partnership Services Group

<sup>2</sup> East Devon Housing Revenue Account Business Plan – [www.eastdevon.gov.uk](http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk)

monitoring system which helps manage contractors' workload and response times. During 2007/08 we carried out almost 10000 responsive repair jobs which were categorised under six headings. Our performance is shown in the following table.

Category	Target	% Completed on target	No. of jobs
Immediate	1 day	93	3866
Emergency	3 days	94	1299
Urgent	7 days	89	2387
Priority	1-3 weeks	85	790
Non-urgent	3-6 weeks	84	673
Change of tenancy	14 days	95	295

In 2007/08 tenant satisfaction with day to day repairs revealed that 98% of tenants felt that the standard of work was reasonable and 94% of tenants felt the length of time they waited for repairs was reasonable (responses from the Repairs and Maintenance Tenant Satisfaction Surveys sent out with repair orders). Our contractors always attempt to undertake responsive repairs in one visit 'right first time'.

The number of **empty properties** available for letting each year is dependent on how many existing tenants terminate their tenancy with us or a housing association. We undertake any necessary major repairs to council properties when they become vacant on a **change of tenancy** and these properties will meet our void standard. Just over £1.2 million was spent on such work in 2007/08.

In March 2008 the Housing Review Board agreed a **five year improvement and modernisation plan** to replace our previous annual programming arrangements. The following criteria have been taken from the Housing Stock Option Retention Plan:

Door replacement programme	to run over the first 17 years of the Plan
Kitchen modernisation	no kitchen will be more than 23 years old
Electrical wiring	inspect all dwellings where no works have been undertaken in the last 20 years
Boiler and heating systems	replace gas boilers identified as 'poor', replace gas boilers older than 15 years, replace electric and solid fuel heating systems over 30 years old
External decoration	undertake every 5 years - rolling programme of repainting to preserve woodwork

It is anticipated that the costs involved and allocated in the HRA Business Plan will be as shown in the table below.

Improvement	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Kitchens and bathrooms	£1,099,000	£1,320,000	£1,270,000	£1,095,000	£1,100,000
Rewiring	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000
Doors/windows	£250,000	£250,000	£250,000	£250,000	£153,000
Central heating	£264,000	£264,000	£264,000	£264,000	£264,000
Roofs	£235,000	£235,000	£235,000	£235,000	£235,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£1,998,000</b>	<b>£2,219,000</b>	<b>£2,169,000</b>	<b>£1,994,000</b>	<b>£1,902,000</b>

Our external repainting programme amounts to an estimated £525,000 in 2008/09. We are offering **tenant choice** over new kitchen fittings and external doors and achieving good value using modern methods of procurement.

The table shows the programme of completed and proposed works from 2007/08 onwards.

<b>Building Element</b>	<b>No. completed 2007/08</b>	<b>No. planned 2008/09</b>	<b>No. planned 2009/10</b>	<b>No. planned 2010/11</b>
Central heating/heating upgrade	86	75	75	75
Replacement windows	37	9	0	0
Replacement doors	298	250	250	153
Re-roofing	0	40	40	40
Kitchen/Bathroom modernisation	266	250	275	285
Exterior re-decoration	922	891	850	891
Electrical wiring upgrade	341	200	200	200

We allocate an annual budget of £265,000 to provide **aids and adaptations** to council dwellings. In 2007/08 we undertook 375 adaptations at a cost of £430,000. Of this figure £380,000 came from capital resources.

Currently we do not operate a formal waiting list for aids and adaptations. The average time taken from receipt of the request to work being completed is for:

- emergencies                    4 days
- urgent work                    7 days
- priority work                   35 days
- routine work                   54 days.

### **6.2.2 Systems thinking**

We will be starting to apply Systems Thinking to homelessness, rent management, void management and allocations in 2009. The customer is at the heart of Systems Thinking methodology, with a 'check, plan, do' process for assessing the work needed to meet customer demand. The technique is already having a major impact in the areas of planning applications and benefits by scrutinising service demand, considering what is valued by the customer, eliminating waste and redesigning services to focus on what is important to the customer and cutting out waste.

The drive for efficiency and continuous improvement means that social housing providers are constantly looking at new ways to deliver services more effectively and provide better value for money. Systems Thinking helps identify and reduce waste and is therefore a valuable tool in achieving efficiency savings, value for money and best value.

### **6.2.3 Generic working**

One of the Audit Commission Inspection recommendations is to review the degree to which tenants may receive a 'one-stop' service from housing officers and reduce officer travelling time. Generic working, where officers are able to offer advice on a range of issues, is being considered.

We will be introducing an incremental approach to manage a transition from our existing service delivery of mainly specialist housing officers, to more generic working in certain areas of the service. We will also be looking at ways of reducing officer travelling time such as home working options and use of area offices. We have recently appointed a generic housing officer to work with both housing needs and estate management and we have also

recruited a modern apprentice to work across the whole of the service for an initial two year period.

These changes will help us move towards a 'one-stop' housing management service.

#### 6.2.4 Housing owned by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)

The table below shows the amount of housing owned by RSLs in East Devon.

Housing Association	Stock owned within East Devon	Vacant dwellings	Lettings in East Devon 2007/8
Hastoe Housing Association	46	0	2
Magna Housing Association	158	0	14
Sovereign Housing Association	132	3	7
Sarsen Housing Association	3	0	0
Sanctuary Shaftesbury	134	3	1
Tor Homes	18	0	1
Devon & Cornwall Housing Association	532	4	80
Signpost Housing Association	36	1	1
The Guinness Trust/ Devon Community Housing Association	86	1	8
Westcountry Housing Association	3	0	0
Housing 21	2	0	0
Raglan Housing Association	38	0	3
Western Challenge Housing Association	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1189</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>117</b>

The condition of housing association owned property is not as good as council owned housing. 38.5% of RSL properties are non decent, compared to 26.2% nationally<sup>3</sup>. (However it should be considered that as the RSL stock is very small this figure is subject to a high degree of statistical variance). We will be encouraging RSL partners to achieve Decent Homes over the next two years.

#### 6.3 Private sector housing

Private sector homes (owner occupied and private rented) in East Devon comprise over 90% of the total housing stock in the district and are therefore an essential ingredient in a comprehensive Housing Strategy.

A Private Sector House Condition survey<sup>4</sup> was carried out in 2006. The main findings of the survey are set out in the following table and have been taken into consideration in formulating our approach to private sector renewal and carefully targeting a range of housing policies in tune with the problems faced by owners and tenants.

<sup>3</sup> Private Sector House Condition Survey 2006, June 2007, Professional Partnership Services Group

<sup>4</sup> Private Sector House Condition Survey 2006, June 2007, Professional Partnership Services Group

- estimated private sector housing stock of East Devon -- 56,900 dwellings
- 80% of dwellings are owner occupied (higher than the national average)
- 10% are private rented, with only 3% being Housing Association properties
- just under 28% of the stock was built pre 1919
- 18,400 (32%) of private sector homes do not meet the Decent Homes Standard – higher than the national figure of 28.7%
- 11400 homes (20%) have at least one serious hazard
- private rented houses and flats are more likely to be non decent than owners' homes – 46% failing the standard
- dwellings in rural areas far more likely to be non decent
- older residents, people with disabilities and people in receipt of benefit are more likely to be at risk of a 'serious hazard' in their dwelling
- overall rate of fuel poverty is 13.2% (in private rented this rises to 18.6% and in Exmouth to 16.9%)
- 1780 private dwellings are vacant

### **6.3.1 Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy (PSHRS)**

This strategy (being updated in 2008) sets out in more detail our approach to renewal, renovation, enforcement and assistance aimed at improving housing conditions in the private sector. There will be significant changes to the previous PSHRS which will include the developing of a loan scheme and other finance options as alternatives to grants to enable homeowners to improve their properties.

The PSHRS is produced with an action plan which identifies targets for specific areas of work that will be monitored, reviewed and reported on over the lifetime of the strategy. Some areas have been detailed below.

There are areas where we are obliged to monitor the progress of private sector housing and intervene if necessary. These include:

- vulnerable people living in non decent dwellings (PSA7) (see below)
- identification of homes with serious hazards – with 11400 homes having a serious hazard we will require adequate numbers of trained Environmental Health Officers to identify and deal with these hazards
- continuation of energy efficiency improvement schemes (see Section 10)
- funding sources and appropriate alternative means of providing financial assistance – without more thought to how other forms of funding might be used it is unlikely that many of the challenges outlined in the strategy can be met.

The Public Service Agreement (PSA) 7 is designed to help vulnerable people have a safe and comfortable place to live. The Private Sector House Condition Survey 2006 highlights that East Devon falls short of the target set for 2010 by 940 properties.

From April 2008 this PSA has been replaced by a Communities and Local Government Departmental Strategic Objective – DSO 2 -:

'To improve the supply, environmental performance and quality of housing that is more responsive to the needs of individuals, communities and the economy.'

Indicators include:-

- 2.8 Percentage of vulnerable households in decent houses in the private sector
- 2.10 Percentage of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living
- 2.11 Percentage of vulnerable people achieving independent living.

To date there is no guidance on these indicators or what are to be used as measures of success and therefore for this strategy the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard have been maintained.

The cost of making private sector homes decent has been estimated at £96.2 million<sup>5</sup>. This cost is spread across both the owner occupied and private rented sectors. Traditionally housing enforcement has been targeted, and will continue to be targeted, at the private rented sector to encourage landlords to improve and maintain their properties. Proposals are to be tabled in the revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy to provide limited financial incentives to landlords to improve energy efficiency and heating measures and further links are to be developed to promote more effective working relationships with private sector landlords.

Owner occupiers are encouraged to maintain their own properties and are provided with advice and information directing them to the various forms of assistance that may be available to them. Assistance may range from mandatory Disabled Facility Grants (see Section 7.11) to discretionary Home Stay grants, insulation and energy efficiency grants and access to appropriately recognised loan or equity release schemes to enable elderly or vulnerable home owners to carry out repairs and remain in their own homes.

### **6.3.2 Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)**

A house that is arranged in a number of separate occupancies may well be classed as a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO). HMO's make up a significant part of the national stock of privately rented housing.

Examples of HMOs: -

- houses subdivided into bedsits
- houses divided into flats (whether self-contained or not)
- bed and breakfast establishments catering for people with no other permanent place of residence
- certain types of hostel and halls of residence.

HMOs form a relatively small proportion of East Devon's stock but we value the contribution that they make to accommodation within the district. There are an estimated 60 HMOs which are three or more storey dwellings with shared amenities and five or more residents. These HMOs became the subject of mandatory licensing in April 2006 and we maintain a strict inspection regime for these properties.

We have also identified more than 300 other HMOs which are subject to periodic inspection but do not fall within the formal licensing regime. We carry out a targeted annual inspection programme for these properties, the details of which can be found within the PSHRS.

Our relationships with HMO landlords and tenants are crucial in encouraging high quality accommodation and we are looking to build further links by seeking a range of user views and providing better and clearer information to them. We are considering the feasibility of a 'package' to encourage HMO landlords to improve energy efficiency and heating measures in the face of the increasing risk of fuel poverty for many.

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<sup>5</sup> Private Sector House Condition Survey 2006, June 2007, Professional Partnership Services Group