

# Housing Strategy 2008–2011



## Executive Summary



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## Introduction and Housing Strategy Aims for 2008-2011

The Housing Strategy seeks to 'ensure that a good quality, affordable home' is available to all local residents and that each home is 'adequate in size and suitably located'. Housing need within the district is high and we set out to identify and prioritise these needs and use available resources to meet them.

The strategy has ten aims, and an Action Plan (**Appendix 1** sets out the aims and some of the main targets).

## The Regional and Local Setting

Within East Devon the main issues about housing include:

- a need for more affordable housing
- the high cost of owner occupation and renting in the private sector
- the wages in the district are low compared to the national average
- poor housing conditions in the private sector
- fuel poverty
- housing for young people

There are a significant number of national, regional and local strategies which have influenced this strategy and they are listed within the full document.

## Housing needs in East Devon and steps being taken to address them

Key Aims of particular relevance to this section of the Housing Strategy	
1.	Provide a range of affordable housing to meet housing needs
2.	Prevent homelessness wherever possible and otherwise ensure that accommodation is provided for those who do become homeless
6.	Enable elderly persons, disabled people and people with special needs to live as independently as possible and remain in their own homes if they so wish
8.	Widen the choice of housing, especially for those in priority need

**The level of housing need:** The Housing Market Assessment 2007 found:

- 28% of households renting from social landlords are in unsuitable housing
- 1046 households are living in overcrowded conditions
- 9% of households have at least one serious problem with their property
- a requirement for 1250 new units of affordable housing over the next five years.

The high level of housing need is reflected by the large numbers on our housing register.

**Homelessness:** Homelessness continues to be a significant problem in the area and tackling, and preventing, homelessness continues to be a high priority. We have just reissued our **Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013** which sets out a series of actions aimed at preventing homelessness and improving the service provided for homeless people.

We continue to take steps to reduce our use of **temporary accommodation** and we have successfully reduced our use of **bed and breakfast accommodation** which is now only used in emergency situations.

**The re-letting of empty properties:** Our aim is to provide an efficient service to ensure properties are empty for the shortest possible time.

We hold a **housing register** which we use to allocate social housing for those in need and at the end of March 2008 there were over 4500 households on all known waiting lists (council and RSL) in the district.

Most of our properties are allocated through the **Choice Based Lettings scheme** which places applicants in gold, silver and bronze bands depending on their priority for housing.

We will shortly be linking with other Devon local authorities in the **Devon Home Choice** scheme. This will give a Devon wide allocation policy and assessment framework.

In 2007 we set up a new **mutual exchange register** to help tenants of both council and housing association properties swap their homes. During 2007/08 36 exchanges took place.

We promote a scheme to encourage tenants to move from large family size homes to smaller properties. Under the '**downsizing**' scheme we will pay up to £1,100 to help with the move. This scheme will be reviewed in the next three years.

**Accessing housing in the private sector:** This is assisted by:

- our **rent deposit/rent in advance scheme**
- the **Private Sector Leasing Scheme** - working with Exeter Empty Homes Partnership
- bringing empty homes back into use (see our **Empty Homes Strategy**).

## Providing new homes

Key Aims of particular relevance to this section of the Housing Strategy	
1.	Provide a range of affordable housing to meet housing needs
8.	Widen the choice of housing, especially for those in priority need

There is a recognised need to provide more affordable housing in the district, a priority within the Council's Corporate Strategy. The housing should be available at a cost low enough for people to afford, taking into account local incomes and house prices, and should remain at an affordable price for future eligible households.

**Affordable housing through planning applications:** Most affordable housing is developed as part of private sector developments through **Section 106 agreements**.

Our **Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance** states that, in the following circumstances, 40% of the housing provided must be affordable:

- in settlements with a population greater than 3000, where the site is 0.5 hectares or more, or where 15 or more dwellings are planned
- in settlements with a population below 3000 where five or more dwellings are planned.

In exceptional circumstances, where affordable housing cannot be provided on site, a '**commuted sum**' (money equivalent) is accepted in place of on-site units.

**Rural housing needs:** Working with the Devon Rural Housing Enablers we use **rural exceptions policies** to provide affordable housing in rural areas, where there is a need, and we work jointly with developers specialising in delivering rural housing.

**The new community – Cranbrook** will be developed in the west of the district close to Exeter. Its initial key features are:

- 2900 dwellings initially, rising to 7500 over time
- dwellings to be built to Code Level 3 of the government’s Code for Sustainable Homes
- the initial 1160 affordable homes will be a mixture of tenure (rented, shared ownership and low cost by design).

**New approaches to delivering housing:** In the current housing market it is essential that we look at more innovative approaches to delivering affordable housing. These include:

- applications from developers for ‘departure’ sites where a high proportion of affordable housing is proposed
- ‘cross subsidy’ proposals on rural housing sites where land would not otherwise be available for development and the local need for full market value housing can be demonstrated
- encouraging our partners to be more proactive in site searching and working up development proposals.

We have set up a ‘**virtual affordable housing delivery team**’ which aims to bring forward land for development which would not otherwise be available to us. We have identified areas of our own land where it may be possible to in-fill with some extra units.

We will consider ‘non traditional’ ways of delivering affordable housing and departures from policy where necessary.

## Maintaining and improving existing homes

Key Aims of particular relevance to this section of the Housing Strategy	
3.	Maintain and manage the council owned housing stock to a high standard, actively involving tenants in all aspects of the service
4.	Bring sub-standard housing (of all tenures) up to current standards
5.	Improve the use and safety of housing

**Council Housing:** This accounts for 7% of housing within East Devon. We are the landlord of 4298 tenanted properties, 176 leasehold flats and 761 garages (as at April 2008). All our properties meet the Decent Homes Standard.

We have **partnering arrangements** with five contractors. All our contractors attempt to undertake responsive repairs in one visit ‘right first time’. We undertake a rolling programme of in-house surveys covering all homes every five years. This is used to influence our 30 year Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

## Future developments and challenges

- In March 2008 the Housing Review Board agreed a **five year improvement and modernisation plan** to replace our previous annual programming arrangements. During 2008/09 we plan to spend almost £2 million on kitchen and bathroom improvements, rewiring, doors and windows, central heating and roofs.
- We must ensure that all homes continue to meet and in many cases **exceed the Decent Homes Standard**
- We will be applying '**systems thinking**' to parts of the Housing Service. The customer is at the heart of systems thinking which is a 'check, plan, do' process for assessing the work needed to meet customer demand.
- We will be moving towards a '**one-stop housing management service**', moving away from our existing service delivery by mainly specialist housing officers to more generic working with officers able to offer advice on a range of issues.

**Housing owned by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs):** There are 13 RSLs with housing in East Devon with a total number of 1190 properties (3% of all housing). 38.5% of RSL properties are 'non decent' (compared to 26.2% nationally) and we will be encouraging RSL partners to achieve Decent Homes Standard over the next two years.

**Private Sector Housing:** This makes up over 90% of total housing in district (80% owner occupied and 10% private rented). 32% of private sector homes don't meet the Decent Homes Standard (higher than national average of 28.7%). 20% of homes have at least one serious hazard. Private rented homes (particularly in rural areas) are more likely to be non decent than owner occupier.

Our approach to improving housing conditions in the private sector is set out in our **Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy**. The cost of making private sector homes (both owner occupier and private sector) decent has been estimated at just over £96 million.

## Providing advice and support

Key Aims of particular relevance to this section of the Housing Strategy	
2.	Prevent homelessness wherever possible and otherwise ensure that accommodation is provided for those who do become homeless
6.	Enable elderly persons, disabled people and people with special needs to live as independently as possible and remain in their own homes if they so wish
7.	Widen the choice of housing, especially for those in priority need
10.	Have consistently satisfied customers

We are committed to supporting and enabling people to stay in their homes, if they so wish, by direct provision and working with other agencies. In many cases homes are suitable but residents need care or support.

**Housing advice:** Our main objectives are to prevent homelessness and inform people how they can gain access to information about housing. Working closely with the private sector, making shared ownership opportunities available, and being more proactive with housing advice has allowed us to develop a range of options for people with housing problems.

**Tenancy sustainment:** We work closely with outgoing and new tenants, and other housing officers. We have recently introduced 'sign up' interviews when tenants are introduced to their new property and help given to access other support services. We actively seek to assist tenants who have rent arrears and use the services of floating support agencies. In October 2008 approximately 50 tenants were receiving such support.

**Council estate management:** The largest number of complaints are to do with untidy gardens, dirty properties, parking offences and misuse of garages, antisocial behaviour (including noise, harassment, nuisance, vandalism and the behaviour of children), and rubbish.

To help reduce estate management complaints we:

- organise a programme of **'estate walkabouts'**
- support the police lead **Community Action Days**
- run an **'out of hours' service** for noise issues
- have a corporate policy for allegations of antisocial behaviour
- have adopted an Antisocial Behaviour Statement
- have a commitment to sign up to the **Respect Agenda**.

**Council housing services for older people and people with support needs:** We have made significant changes to our support services in the last two years, responding to changing tenant aspirations and pressures from Supporting People. These have included:

- providing a more professional and flexible mobile support service
- increased use of Mobile Support Officers covering one or several sites
- personal Support Plans and Risk Assessments for every resident.

In line with Supporting People developments we are currently working on:

- moving towards a fully mobile support officer service
- preparing for the separation of housing related support from the accommodation charges
- reviewing sheltered housing and decommissioning of schemes which do not reach Supporting People standards.

**Decommissioning** of sheltered housing is about changing its current use and removing the housing related support from the scheme. It will give us greater flexibility in letting properties. A significant number of tenants living in sheltered accommodation have no or low support needs. Decommissioned properties can still be let to older people with no support needs or to non elderly households.

We have been investigating the demand for a **mobile support service in the private sector** and there is considerable opportunity to provide a visiting service to older people. We have also been involved with the **PCT Falls Prevention Initiative** and are working with Devon County Council on delivering an **extra care sheltered housing scheme** in Exmouth.

**Community alarm service – Home Safeguard:** The alarm service has over 6000 customers, 1400+ sheltered accommodation tenants and 4600+ private users. We are exploring ‘**telecare**’ opportunities (devices connected to the call centre by technology such as phone lines). We are producing a marketing plan and pursuing accreditation from the Telecare Services Association.

**Supporting People (SP):** The Supporting People programme offers vulnerable, elderly and disabled people the opportunity of improving their quality of independent living. We are involved in shaping future services in the county with SP and are represented on the SP Joint Commissioning Body.

**Housing assistance and Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs):** Our policy is to target grants which address issues of health, safety and disrepair, and assist the elderly, disabled and householders on low incomes. Grants will also be targetted at energy efficiency and encouraging owners of empty properties to bring them back into use.

**The Home Improvement Agency – Devon Care and Repair (DC&R)** has a five year contract with Devon County Council to provide a Home Improvement Agency. It provides services to the elderly and disabled which include assisting with applying for DFGs and renovation grants, coordinating major adaptations, carrying out minor adaptations and basic DIY tasks.

**Community Safety:** We are members of the Community Safety Partnership Steering Group which is committed to making East Devon a safe place in which to live, work and visit. It has drawn up the East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership Plan 2008-2011 which concentrates on three priority areas – tackling violent crime, tackling serious acquisitive crime (theft), and reducing antisocial behaviour.

## Involvement

Key Aims of particular relevance to this section of the Housing Strategy	
3.	Maintain and manage the council owned housing stock to a high standard, actively involving tenants in all aspects of the service
9.	Support the improvement and regeneration of local communities by encouraging social inclusion, involving children and young people in housing issues, and enabling residents to actively participate in their communities
10.	Have consistently satisfied customers

**Community empowerment – duty to involve:** A new ‘duty to involve local representatives’ will be introduced in April 2009. Local authorities will have to involve representatives from the local community by providing information, consultation and involving in other ways.

**Tenant participation:** We have a well developed culture of tenant participation and an active **Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel**.

Following the Housing Stock Options Appraisal the **Housing Review Board** was set up to oversee our landlord functions. It has councillor, tenant and independent members.

Tenants can get involved in a number of different ways and these are set out in our **Tenant and Council Partnership Agreement April 2008**.

**Tenant Satisfaction:** We are pleased to report very high levels of tenant satisfaction as shown by the results of the STATUS survey 2008.

## Housing and specific client groups

Key Aims of particular relevance to this section of the Housing Strategy	
6.	enable elderly persons, disabled people and people with special needs to live as independently as possible and remain in their own homes if they so wish
8.	Widen the choice of housing, especially for those in priority need
9.	Support the improvement and regeneration of local communities by encouraging social inclusion, involving children and young people in housing issues, and enabling residents to actively participate in their communities
10.	Have consistently satisfied customers

**Children and young people** are one of the seven priorities within our Corporate Strategy. With **Every Child Matters** in mind, the Devon Children’s Trust Partnership has drawn up the **Devon Children and Young People’s Plan 2008-2011**. We have a Community Development Worker who works with young people to give a voice to the large majority of council house residents who are not yet adult.

**Older and disabled people who are not council tenants:** We assist elderly and disabled persons who are not council tenants in a number of ways including:

- the community alarm service
- undertaking adaptations and improvements using the DFG programme
- working closely with local occupational therapists
- working with other partners who help people to continue to live independently.

**Victims of domestic violence:** We liaise closely with other partner agencies and the East Devon Domestic Violence Forum meets regularly. There is a Devon wide code of good practice that all local authorities use. In East Devon a ‘sanctuary’ scheme has been operating, free of charge, for about a year. This enables victims to remain in their own home with additional security measures and support.

**Black and ethnic minority (BME):** The local BME population is low (0.7%). The highest proportion in the 2001 Census was Chinese. We have adopted a Racial Equality Policy for rented housing and the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel have a Race Equality Statement. We will shortly be carrying out a full tenant profiling exercise.

**Gypsies, travellers and residential mobile homes:** The Devon wide Gypsy and Traveller Housing Needs Assessment 2006 made 14 recommendations covering pitch provision, service provision and better communication and information sharing. There is a need for a further nine pitches by 2011 and we will be working with Planning towards meeting this.

**Overseas workers:** In 2006/07 registered overseas workers made up 8% of the working population in the district. Workers from Poland were the largest proportion of these. Accommodation linked to their employment often has many problems and migrants are often obliged to live in the private rented sector or in temporary accommodation.

**People with learning disabilities:** For many people with disabilities schemes have been developed offering a range of support and accommodation. In East Devon there are about 320 individuals with learning disabilities. Some will never be able to live in mainstream housing. Others will require support in their existing homes and some may require housing either to meet their specific needs or because they need to live independently. We will work with the learning disability team to ensure that suitable accommodation is available when required.

**Equality Statement:** We are committed to the promotion of equal opportunities in all of our activities and we value diversity. We have recently adopted a corporate Equality and Diversity Policy and during 2008/09 all housing staff will undertake further equality and diversity training.

## Energy efficiency, fuel poverty and sustainability

Key Aims of particular relevance to this section of the Housing Strategy	
7.	Improve the sustainability and energy efficiency of housing and eliminate fuel poverty

**Energy efficiency and fuel poverty:** Improving energy efficiency in the home is a high priority. In East Devon we have:

- reduced energy usage by 21.59% since 1996 (against a target of 30% by 2011)
- set a target to achieve a SAP rating for council housing of 75 by December 2010
- from October 2008 carried out Energy Performance surveys on all council properties which are sold or re-let.

We are involved with a number of energy saving initiatives, in partnership with other agencies, including the 'Heat project, 'Warmfront' and Devon Warm Zones.

Fuel poverty occurs when a household has to spend more than 10% of its income on heating and hot water. Overall fuel poverty in East Devon is 13.2%, with the rate in Exmouth being 16.9% and in the private rented sector 18.6%.

**Sustainability:** We are committed to the principles of sustainability in all our activities. We aim to meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity.

We have put in place a Climate Change Strategy, and our Carbon Management Strategy will include the energy used in council owned housing within the baseline measure of our carbon footprint.

## **Housing investment and resources**

Housing investment, using both capital and revenue resources, is key to delivering this strategy, and is aimed at meeting housing needs, improving existing homes, and providing housing services.

**Capital Funding:** We have allocated in excess of £12.6 million in our corporate Capital Plan for housing projects for the period 2008-2011. This represents 66% of the Council's total capital programme.

Our corporate programme for capital investment is set out in the Council's Capital Strategy. The expenditure programme for housing is mainly for:

- grants to RSLs to provide affordable housing
- maintaining council housing to a high standard
- providing disabled facilities grants and other forms of housing assistance.

Details of the programme are given on page 57 of the full Housing Strategy.

Money from Section 106 agreements is kept in a separate reserve and the amount available for local affordable housing within East Devon is approximately £374,000 (as at September 2008).

## **Revenue funding**

**The Housing Revenue Account (HRA)** - for a table of income and expenditure for 2007/08 please see page 58 of the full Housing Strategy. This account relates to the housing stock the Council provides directly and for 2007/08 there was a surplus of £0.52 million. This was transferred to balances and at 31 March 2008 the HRA balance was £2.204 million.

**Rent collection:** For 2008/09 the income from rents (dwelling and garage) is forecast to generate £13.7 million. Approximately half of this will be paid directly by tenants and half

indirectly as housing benefit. Rent income collection is monitored and our target performance for 2008/09 is 98.5%. Introducing new payment methods and focusing on debt prevention are key. We have made several recent changes to the rental service including:

- setting up a 24/7 phone line for paying by debit card
- introducing monthly 'direct debit' to our range of payment methods
- sending out quarterly rent statements to all tenants
- more actively pursuing unpaid rent debts.

We have started to use a debt collection agency to collect unpaid rent and aim to reduce the levels of rent arrears. However it is better, both for tenants and for us, if they can retain their home and pay their debt.

**HRA subsidy:** As a stock retaining local authority we operate in a heavily constrained system of housing finance. We are in a position of 'negative subsidy'. We have to pay into a central pool from which subsidies are paid to other council housing providers. We pay almost 40% of the rental income as subsidy. East Devon has been lobbying the Government to make changes to the housing subsidy system.

**Local and countrywide staffing resources:** There are a total of 84 full-time equivalent staff carrying out housing functions in East Devon. Also we share two countywide Rural Housing Enablers, a countywide Homelessness Coordinator and a countywide Affordable Housing Coordinator who assist with delivering this strategy.

It is important to remember that we cannot and should not deliver the Housing Strategy alone and delivery of the aims requires effective partnership working. We are grateful to all our partner agencies that have helped with drawing up the strategy and who will work with us to deliver the key aims.

For further information about the strategy please contact:

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## APPENDIX 1

## THE 10 KEY AIMS

The 10 aims have been carefully devised to address the main housing issues in the district. Below is a list of the aims and some of the main targets. The complete Action Plan is reproduced within the full Housing Strategy.

<b>1.</b>	<b>Provide a range of affordable housing</b>
	Deliver at least <b>200 affordable homes</b> each year from 2008-2011, rising to 300 each year from 2011-15
	Complete at least <b>one rural based housing scheme</b> in 2008/09, rising to three schemes a year by 2010/11
	Return <b>20 vacant properties</b> back to use in the rented sector in 2008, rising by 20% year on year
<b>2.</b>	<b>Prevent homelessness wherever possible, and otherwise ensure that accommodation is provided for those who do become homeless</b>
	Achieve less than 100 <b>homeless acceptances</b> per year by the end of 2010/2011
	Meet and exceed the <b>void target</b> of 28 days to re-let properties by 31.3.09 (25 days by 31.03.10 and 20 days by 31.03.11)
	Provide a further 9 <b>pitches for gypsies and travellers</b> by 2011 (21 by 2026)
<b>3.</b>	<b>Maintain and manage the council owned housing stock to a high standard, actively involving tenants in all aspects of the service</b>
	All council houses to continue to meet the <b>Decent Homes Standard</b> and <b>enhanced void standard</b>
	97% of <b>responsive repairs</b> to be completed in time during 2009/10 (98% by 2010/11)
	Produce an effective and up to date <b>void standard</b> meeting tenant aspirations by December 2010
<b>4.</b>	<b>Bring sub-standard housing (of all tenures) up to current standards</b>
	Meet all targets within the <b>Private Sector Renewal Strategies</b> and Action Plans
<b>5.</b>	<b>Improve the use and safety of housing</b>
	Increase the number of households using the <b>downsizing scheme</b> year on year (achieve 20 by 2008/09, 25 in 2009/10, and 27 in 2010/11)
	Carry out annual <b>risk assessments of community centres and communal areas</b> in sheltered housing – all centres to meet health and safety and DDA requirements and have standard fixtures and fittings
	100% of all council housing has an <b>annual gas safety check</b>

<b>6.</b>	<b>Enable elderly persons, disabled people, and people with special needs to live as independently as possible and remain in their own homes if they so wish</b>
	Review the possible <b>decommissioning of sheltered housing</b> – each scheme to be assessed to ensure it meets Supporting People standards and local needs
	Continue to work towards a <b>fully mobile support officer service</b> for our sheltered schemes
	Work with Devon County Council to deliver an <b>extra care sheltered scheme</b> in Exmouth
<b>7.</b>	<b>Improve the sustainability and energy efficiency of housing and eliminate fuel poverty</b>
	Reduce by 5% a year the estimated number of households in <b>fuel poverty</b>
	Ensure that all new affordable housing meets a minimum level <b>Code 3 of the Sustainable Homes</b>
	<b>Increase the SAP rating</b> of council properties to an average of 75 by December 2010
<b>8.</b>	<b>Widen the choice of housing, especially for those in priority need</b>
	Maintain and promote <b>the mutual exchange register</b> so that more people use the service year on year
	Implement the <b>Devon wide Choice Based Lettings Scheme</b>
	Continue to fund and advertise the <b>rent deposit/rent in advance scheme</b> , and introduce a <b>rent guarantee scheme</b> – more households using these schemes year on year
<b>9.</b>	<b>Support the improvement and regeneration of local communities by encouraging social inclusion, involving children and young people in housing issues, and enabling residents to actively participate in their communities</b>
	Work with the Children’s Trust Housing Steering Group and young tenants to produce a <b>Young Person’s Housing Strategy</b>
	Sign up to the <b>Respect Agenda</b>
	Continue to use <b>demoted tenancies</b> and review the option to bring in <b>introductory tenancies</b>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Have consistently satisfied customers.</b>
	Move towards a <b>‘one stop’ housing management service</b> with a greater number of staff working across the traditional housing disciplines
	Monitor the results of <b>STATUS 2008</b> and put in appropriate action to maintain high levels of tenant satisfaction
	Deliver the <b>Audit Commission recommendations</b>