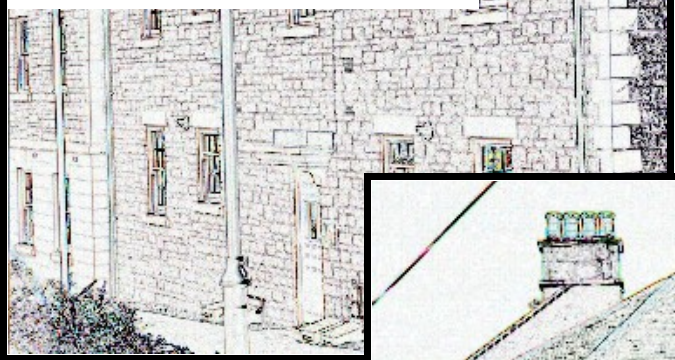


**HOUSING
STRATEGY
2005-2008**



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Corporate Context

The Corporate Management Board (CMB) is made up of the Chief Executive and four Strategic Managers. CMB collectively shares responsibility and accountability for the strategic management and leadership of North Wiltshire District Council, the

management of its performance and delivery of the Council's priorities and services as identified in the Corporate Plan.

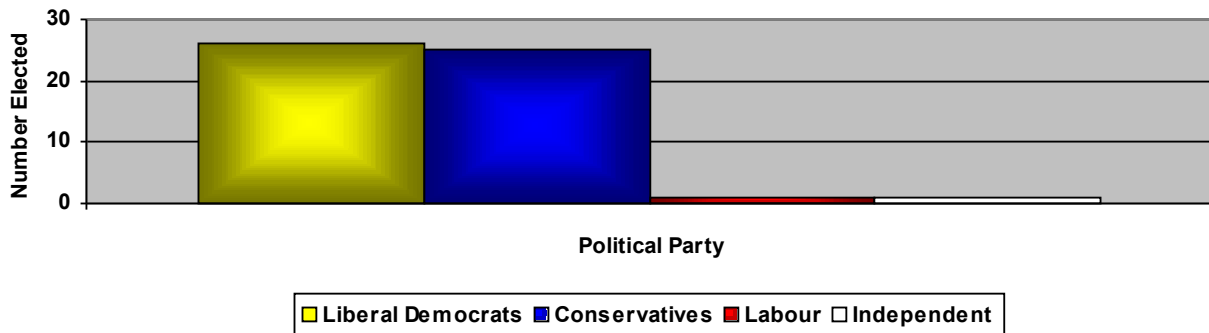
Four business areas make up the Council's organisational structure. These are:

Customer Services	Corporate Services	Planning Services	Community & Environment
Cleansing & Amenities Investigations Council Tax Housing Benefit Recovery Customer Contact	Finance Human Resources ICT Legal Policy & Democratic Services Corporate Admin & Member Support	Implementation Building Control Spatial Planning Customer Focus	Housing Regeneration & Assets Design & Estates Community Partnership Environmental Health Customer & Business Support

The Elected Representatives of North Wiltshire

The Council consists of 53 Members elected at whole Council elections held every four years. The last election took place in May 2003 and, following a by-election in August 2005, the political balance is:

Elected Representatives of North Wiltshire



The main democratic structure consists of:

- ◆ The Leader of the Council
- ◆ An Executive Committee comprising 10 Members appointed by the Leader of the Council
- ◆ An Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- ◆ 5 Area Committees



Our mission statement, “**Improving North Wiltshire**” is the foundation of all the Council’s activities and is carried forward into our four Corporate Aims which are:

To create a customer service culture by investing in and empowering those who serve the public

To ensure high quality, cost effective services.

To enable the provision of responsive, accessible and fair services delivered with courtesy and care

To safeguard and enhance the assets and resources of North Wiltshire and the wider community

These Corporate Aims underpin the key priorities for the Council and to ensure that each of these priorities are delivered, a lead Member and Officer is accountable for the progress and delivery of the actions. The Corporate Plan is reviewed monthly as part of the performance management review at Corporate Management Board and is reported quarterly to the Executive and Overview & Scrutiny Committees.

The timetable for reporting to Executive Committee corresponds with the Budget process to ensure that the Corporate Plan drives budget and resource allocation year on year.

The identification of Corporate priorities is influenced by:

- External influences eg changes in Government policies
- Priorities set by elected members
- Community ambitions identified through the Local Strategic Partnership

The Corporate Plan forms a key part of the Council’s business planning process and is reflected in the four Business Area plans, Team plans and individual work plans. This ensures that accountability and responsibility for delivery is identified and reviewed and monitored monthly.

The Corporate Priorities identified for 2005-06 are:

- **Equality and Diversity – including young people and older people**
- **Minimise Waste – Maximise Recycling**
- **Housing Needs**
- **Buoyant Economy**
- **Local Plan/Local Development Framework/Spatial Planning**
- **Healthy Lifestyles, including Sports Development and Arts Development**
- **Cleaner, Safer and Better Streets**
- **Car Parks and Decriminalisation**
- **Customer Focus**
- **Partnership Working**

Everything to be supported by strong partnership working and community engagement, working towards building true community spirit and a caring society.

These priorities have been chosen as they are areas where major change and/or improvement will be carried out during 2005-06, in response to local people's views, national targets and new legislative duties.

In order to deliver the Corporate Plan, each of the priorities identified have clear milestone targets in place. For the Housing Team these are:

- Implement updates of housing needs across the District to achieve a minimum of 5 local needs surveys per year and a District Wide Housing Needs Survey every five years in 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020.
- Target initiatives to keep people in their own homes through the grants programme, homelessness prevention and partnership working.
- Carry out a specialist survey to clarify the needs of gypsies and travellers by March 2006.
- Work with other Wiltshire districts to meet a target of not putting any young people into unsuitable temporary accommodation by March 2008.
- Deliver 100 affordable homes per year up to 2008.

For a full copy of the Corporate Plan please contact Corporate Services on 01249 706418 or **706614** or visit our website at www.northwiltshire.gov.uk

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

A Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of the District Council was conducted by the Audit Commission in January 2005. The purpose of this inspection is to help the Council to deliver better services to the community.

The overall assessment was that the way the District Council was run and the delivery of its services was **fair**.

Some of the strengths identified were:

- Good quality services such as street cleaning, refuse collection and recycling and planning.
- Investment of resources in improving services
- Good partnership working in urban and rural regeneration
- The provision of affordable housing

Some of the weaknesses were:

- No long term vision
- Not achieving consistently high services in all priority services
- More research needed into the needs of minority groups

The inspection placed considerable focus on how well the Council understood the housing market and whether we had developed the right proposals to help balance the housing market.

In this part of the inspection, the Audit commission found that our strengths outweighed our weaknesses and that there was a low need for service improvement.

The Housing Strategy is one of a number of inter-related Council strategies which feeds into the wider Corporate Plan. These include:

Best Value Performance Plan 2005/2006

The Best Value Performance Plan is a tool for reporting the measures being undertaken to improve outcomes for local people and recording our progress in delivering these outcomes. The Plan brings together the Council’s corporate priorities, Best Value Performance Indicators and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Improvement Plan targets.

One of the key priorities is affordable housing. The Best Value Performance Plan includes a number of performance measures relating to housing and homelessness aimed at improving the Council’s performance in this area.

For a full copy of the Best Value Performance Plan please contact Corporate Services on 01249 706418 or routen@northwilts.gov.uk or visit our website at www.northwilts.gov.uk

Community Strategy/LSP

North Wiltshire has developed its Community Strategy through the North Wiltshire Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), a forum consisting of partners from local government, other public services such as Health and the Police, voluntary & community groups, housing associations, young people and the business sector. The LSP identified a vision for North Wiltshire featuring 8 critical areas for the social, economic and environmental well being of the District.

The key areas are:

- Social Care & Health
- Countryside
- Housing & the Built Environment
- Economy
- Transport
- Crime & Community Protection
- Education, Skills & Learning
- Culture

Examples of how the Council’s Housing Strategy links in with these critical areas are shown in the table below

Priority Area	Key Issues`	Housing Strategy
Social Care & Health	Support for vulnerable people	Partnership working with other agencies to provide accessible housing for vulnerable people across the District
Countryside	Appropriate development not over development	Joint funding of a Rural Housing Enabler to assess housing need in

		rural communities and help to deliver new affordable housing where a need is identified
Housing & the Built Environment	Ensuring sufficient housing of all types to meet the needs of the community	<p>Aim to deliver at least 100 new affordable homes each year.</p> <p>Sub-Regional group established to share resources and good practice.</p> <p>Comprehensive Needs information to inform appropriate targeting of resources.</p> <p>Home Improvement Agency works with partners to deliver grants, advice and assistance to enable people to remain in their own homes.</p> <p>Provision of Community Alarms.</p> <p>Funding of a Handy Person service.</p> <p>Alternative housing options to access the private sector such as low cost home ownership and the Rent Deposit Scheme.</p> <p>Working in partnership with Westlea Housing Association and Supporting People to carry out a strategic review of older people's services.</p> <p>Working with Planning on the emerging Local Plan to ensure that new developments will be sustainable</p>
Crime & Community Protection	Anti-Social Behaviour	<p>Westlea Housing Association working with partners and producing initiatives to combat anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>The Council also hosts an Anti-Social Behaviour</p>

For a full copy of the Community Strategy please contact Jo Cogswell, Community Partnership Team Leader, on 01249 706455 or jcogswell@northwilts.gov.uk or visit our website at www.northwilts.gov.uk

Community Safety Strategy

The key priorities for the North Wiltshire Community Safety Partnership are:

- To reduce offending behaviour
- To reduce victimisation
- To prioritise higher crime neighbourhoods
- To reduce crimes of violence
- To reduce anti-social behaviour
- To reduce drug & alcohol related harm
- To reduce road casualties
- To make people feel safer

The Housing Team is working closely with partners from other agencies to make North Wiltshire a safer place to live by ensuring that:

- New housing developments are “secure by design”
- Anti-Social behaviour is tackled by our partner Registered Social Landlords
- Community Alarms are provided for vulnerable people
- All serious and sex offenders are managed through the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- The two refuges for women fleeing domestic violence will continue to be funded through the Supporting People Programme
- We will continue to co-operate with the Police and other agencies in the Witness Protection Programme
- The North Wiltshire Handy Person Scheme will provide home safety checks for vulnerable people, especially the elderly
- We work in partnership with Health to provide housing with support for people with mental health problems
- We work with agencies such as the Drugs & Homelessness Initiative to ensure that support is provided for people with drug and alcohol problems

For a full copy of the Strategy for Reducing Crime and Combating Drug Misuse in Wiltshire please contact Mark Rippon, Community Safety Officer on 01249 706416 or mrippon@northwilts.gov.uk or visit our website at www.northwilts.gov.uk

Economic Regeneration Strategy

The Economic Regeneration Strategy 2005 – 2008 guides the economic regeneration activities of North Wiltshire District Council over the next three years. Working in partnership

with other public, private and voluntary organisations is essential to the key issues affecting the North Wiltshire economy. The main links the Housing Strategy has with economic regeneration are inward investment and rural development objectives.

An essential part of economic regeneration is to ensure that our communities are sustainable and the Housing Team is keen to ensure that:

- Residents of North Wiltshire have access to a decent home
- The gap between the need for and the supply of new affordable housing is reduced
- The potential for redevelopment of brown-field land is exploited
- New affordable housing is built in sustainable locations well served by local facilities such as transport, schools and shops
- Where possible, opportunities to provide energy efficient properties using sustainable materials are exploited
- Allocations policies result in mixed and balanced communities
- There are equal opportunities for all to access housing services

For a full copy of the Economic Regeneration Strategy please contact Gwyn De-arth, Regeneration and Asset Management Team Leader on 01249 706450 or gdearth@northwilts.gov.uk or visit our website at www.northwilts.gov.uk

Local Plan and Local Development Framework

There are clear links between the Housing Strategy in its plans to secure affordable housing and North Wiltshire District Council's Local Plan and Local Development Framework. Housing and Planning officers have been working closely to develop more robust planning measures to ensure that affordable housing will be an essential consideration of any housing development plans in the District.

In accordance with the emerging Local Plan 2011, the Council will seek to negotiate an element of affordable housing to meet local needs on all housing developments of either 15 or more dwellings or 0.5 hectares in size. The percentage will normally be on the basis of 30% subsidised, with an additional proportion being low cost housing. This is subject to local need and will depend upon robust housing needs information provided by the Housing Team.

In rural areas the council will negotiate on the basis of 50% subsidised housing with additional low cost housing subject to need on all sites.

In addition, the exception site policy in the Local Plan allows for sites outside the framework of small settlements to be developed for affordable housing where a need is identified.

The emerging Local Plan 2011 will help to ensure that a proportion of all housing provided in the district is affordable for the communities of North Wiltshire.

For a full copy of the Local Plan please contact Louise Tilsed on 01249 706565 or <mailto:ltilsed@northwilts.gov.uk> or visit our website at www.northwilts.gov.uk

Wider Priorities

In establishing its future priorities the Council takes account of the national and regional picture. This section summarises how national, regional and sub-regional strategies have informed the production of our housing strategy.

National Priorities

In February 2003 the Government launched its Sustainable Communities Plan, a comprehensive programme to improve people's homes, neighbourhoods and quality of life. The plan set out a vision to meet people's housing need in sustainable communities.

The next phase in delivering the Sustainable Communities Plan was introduced with the production of two partner strategies in January 2005, "**Sustainable Communities – Homes for all**", a plan to create communities which provide not only housing but jobs, services and infrastructure and "**Sustainable Communities – People, Places and Prosperity**", which sets out plans to promote good governance, empower communities, tackle disadvantage and make places cleaner, safer and greener.

The Council is committed to building sustainable communities and achieving a balance between economic, social and environmental objectives through community planning and the Community Strategy, the Community Safety Strategy, the Regeneration Strategy, the emerging Local Plan and the Housing Strategy.

The Housing Team will focus on:

New Affordable Housing

- Continue to encourage our Housing Association partners to develop new affordable housing to good or excellent Eco-homes standards.
- Enable new affordable housing of varied tenure in sustainable locations to ensure that people in housing need have a range of housing options
- Work with partners to ensure options for education, employment, health and leisure services and support are available to all residents of new affordable housing

Improving Existing Housing

- Focus grant funding on ensuring that those most in need are able to live in decent housing. The Council in partnership with the other Wiltshire Councils is exploring providing assistance through other alternatives such as loans and equity release.
- Energy efficiency promotion to meet HECA (Home Energy Conservation Act) targets
- Working with partners to meet the Government aim to make all homes decent by 2010

Social Inclusion

- In addition to the District-Wide Housing Needs Survey, carry out further research to identify the housing needs of all residents in the District including minority groups and those subject to exclusion through poverty, discrimination, poor housing, ill health or family breakdown.
- Commission specific research into the housing needs of gypsies and travellers.

- Provide alternative temporary accommodation for homeless people to reduce the use of unsuitable Bed & Breakfast accommodation.
- Review our Allocations Policy and Housing Advice service to ensure there is choice and equality of access to housing services for all the residents of North Wiltshire.

Decent Homes Standard

Following the Housing Green Paper 2000, the main essence of the Government's Housing Policy Statement, "Quality and Choice" was to ensure a decent home for all.

The Government has set a target that all social housing should meet the Decent Homes Standard and that 70% of vulnerable households in the private sector should live in Decent Homes by 2010.

The Council is committed to this objective and works closely with partners in social housing, and planning and building control, to ensure that this target will be met.

Housing Act 2004

The Housing Act 2004 received Royal Assent on 18th November 2004. This is a major piece of legislation which deals in the main with housing standards and conditions in the private sector. The aim of the act is to create a fairer housing market for all those who own, rent or let residential property while protecting the most vulnerable households in the community. This Act will have an important impact on how Housing Renewal will be carried out within North Wiltshire in the future.

Some of the main provisions of the act are:

- **Housing Health & Safety Rating System**
This Act replaces the existing Housing Fitness Standard with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. The Housing Fitness Standard is based on criteria first introduced 80 years ago. Its replacement by the new Housing Health & Safety Rating system represents a important shift in thinking from a system that primarily deals with the physical condition of the property to one which is concerned with the risk posed to the occupants by the condition of the property.
- **Licensing of House in Multiple Occupation.**
The Housing Act introduces a mandatory scheme to license all properties of 3 stories and above that are rented to more than one household and contain at least 5 occupants.
- **Selective Licensing of Private Landlords.**
This enables Local Authorities to tackle areas of low housing demand and the difficulties caused by anti-social behaviour through new powers.
- **Interim and Final Management Orders**
These orders enable the Local Authority to take over the management of licensable Houses in Multiple Occupation. An Interim management order lasts for a maximum of 12 months while a Final order is valid up to five years.
- **Interim & Final Empty Dwelling Management Order**

These orders enable the Local Authority to take over the management of empty properties as determined by Residential Property Tribunals. An interim order can only be used with the consent of the owner, while a final order can be made without the consent of the homeowner.

- **Overcrowding Notices**

The act provides for notices to be issued for overcrowding in non Licensable Houses in Multiple Occupation. Overcrowding in other Houses in Multiple occupation are covered by Licence Conditions.

- **Home Information Packs**

There is a new requirement for sellers or estate agents to produce a home information pack before marketing any residential property for sale along with provision for an ombudsman scheme for estate agents.

- **Right To Buy Scheme**

There have been a number of changes to the Right to Buy Scheme in order to lessen the impact of Right to Buy sales on the availability of affordable housing. In order to achieve this the Act:

- A) Extends the initial qualification period from two to five years (for new tenants after January 2005).
- B) Extends the period after sale during which landlords may require owners to repay some or all of their discount from three to five years.

- **Strengthening the Rights of Park Homeowners.**

The Act extends the rights of households especially in the area of the Protection from Harassment to include mobile homes and gypsy residences.

- **Power of the Housing Corporation**

The Housing Corporation now will have the power to give social housing grant to non-registered social landlords.

- **Tenancy Deposit Schemes**

The act introduces a new safeguard for deposits paid in connection with assured short-hold tenancies.

- **Eligibility For Disabled Facilities Grants**

The eligibility for Disabled Facilities Grants has been extended to include all those occupying caravans as their only main residence.

- **Assessing the Accommodation Needs of Gypsies and Travellers**

Under the Act there is a requirement for Local Housing Authorities to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and travellers in their area, and produce a strategy on how these needs can be met.

For more Information on the Housing Act –Please check the ODPM website
www.odpm.gov.uk

Heca – Home Energy Conservation Act 1995

Improved energy efficiency of homes has a direct effect on the health and well being of the community. Inadequate warmth within the home, either due to fuel poverty or the physical

condition of the property, is the biggest single factor related to poor health in the very young and the elderly. It is therefore very important that we promote energy efficiency and warm homes wherever possible.

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 requires all local housing authorities to identify and implement practicable and cost effective measures to improve energy efficiency in all homes by 30% by 2010. North Wiltshire District Council works with other Wiltshire Councils and Wiltshire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre, a local energy advice service, to carry out surveys, promotional work to raise awareness and provide grants to achieve this aim. As part of the Heca obligations, local authorities must also report on their activities to tackle fuel poverty and a local Affordable Warmth Strategy has been developed by Heca partners, health professionals and agencies such as Age Concern.

For a full copy of the Affordable Warmth Strategy please contact Tom McCutcheon, Principal Private Sector Housing Officer on 01249 706305, tmccutcheon@northwilts.gov.uk

Homelessness Act 2002

The Homelessness Act 2002 sets out the legislative framework for assisting homeless households and the allocation social housing. One of the main requirements of the Act was that all Local Authorities should produce a Homelessness Strategy focused on:

- The reduction in the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for families
- Increased support for people in temporary accommodation
- Increased emphasis on preventing homelessness.

The Council produced its first Homelessness Strategy in July 2003 and has already reduced, and in many cases avoided, the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for homeless families. The average length of stay in B&B has decreased from 6 weeks in 2003/04 to 3 weeks in 2004/05. In addition to this we have expanded our use of the Rent Deposit Scheme to enable people to access the private sector, improved our links with private landlords and, in partnership with Westlea Housing Association and Sarsen Housing Association, introduced a private sector leasing scheme which provides decent, self-contained temporary accommodation throughout the District.

A full copy of the Homelessness Strategy can be obtained from Jan Parry, Principal Housing Needs Officer on 01249 706321 or jparry@northwilts.gov.uk or visit our website at www.northwilts.gov.uk

Rough Sleeping Target

Monitoring undertaken by the Community Voluntary Services (CVS) and the Salvation Army at the North Wiltshire Homeless Project has revealed that, on average, 2 or 3 people are sleeping rough on any single night. Therefore, there is little justification for carrying out a Rough Sleepers Counts given the resources available to us and the rural nature of the District.

Regional Priorities

The Government's Sustainable Communities Plan introduced a move towards more regionally based government. Regional Housing Boards were set up to allocate investment and develop regional housing policy.

In this region the South West Housing Body (SWHB) is the Regional Housing Board responsible for planning and directing regional policy and strategy relating to housing.

The Regional Housing Strategy 2005 - 2016

The following issues have been highlighted as particular challenges in the South West:

- **High and on-going Housing demand** – Household growth is 29% compared with 21% nationally and this trend is expected to continue.
- **Under delivery of new homes** – There has been an estimated shortfall of 4,600 homes in the last 7 years
- **Difficulties in accessing owner occupation** – particularly for first time buyers
- **Rising homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation** – Homeless acceptances have increased by over 40% between 1999 and 2003
- **Shortage of affordable housing** – current stocks of affordable housing unable to compensate for problems in accessing owner occupation and rising homelessness
- **High levels of second and holiday homes**
- **High levels of Right to Buy sales** – over 130,000 homes have been sold in the region and the proportion of social rented housing is among the lowest in the country at approximately 15%
- **The challenge of major sites** – Development growth is now being concentrated on Principal Urban Areas (PUAs) and it will be essential to ensure that communities are balanced and sustainable

While the Council strongly supports the aim to increase the number of affordable homes in the region, there is concern that the focus on large urban areas will affect people's choices in where they want to live. This will have a considerable impact in areas such as North Wiltshire where there is a great need to support the provision of new affordable housing in sustainable rural communities and the regeneration of our market towns.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The South West Regional Assembly was designated the South West's Regional Planning Body (RPB) in September 2004. This body is required to:

- Review and revise the existing Regional Planning Guidance. This was first published in 2001 as the RPG 10 and is now called the Regional Spatial Strategy
- Develop a new Regional Spatial Strategy for 2006 – 2026 to set a regional framework for development.

The Regional Assembly has identified five broad aims for the region. These are:

- To harness the benefits of population growth and manage the implications of population change;
- To enhance our distinctive environments and the quality & diversity of our cultural life;

- To enhance our economic prosperity and ensure the quality of employment opportunity;
- To address deprivation and disadvantage to reduce significant intra-regional inequalities;
- To make sure that people are treated fairly and can participate fully in society.

A draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) is currently being prepared and it is expected that the draft document will be submitted to Government at the end of March 2006.

The Council will work within the framework of the Regional Spatial Strategy to ensure we work towards meeting the key aims identified. In particular the RSS aim to deliver sufficient housing to meet needs across the region to provide choice and address affordability together with ensuring adequate provision is made to cater for minority groups in the region such as gypsies and travellers will be taken forward by this housing strategy.

Sub-Regional Priorities

M4 Corridor Group

This group was formed to respond to the emerging sub-regional agenda in order to present the collective case for meeting the housing needs of the north eastern part of the region.

The group consists of officers from North Wiltshire DC, West Wiltshire DC, Swindon BC, Kennet DC and Cotswold DC.

The main focus of the group so far has been to explore areas of commonality and the potential for joint working. The group meets quarterly to bring together the work of the sub-groups, which have been set up to explore:

- Affordable home ownership – looking at the potential for common application forms, shared ownership and a common affordability criteria
- Housing Market Assessment – procuring a joint housing market assessment to identify market forces, homelessness and affordability issues
- Lettings and Allocations – exploring the possibilities of sharing systems, common policies, more flexible allocations across Districts, sharing information on Choice Based Lettings
- RSL Development Partnership – a forum is being planned to explore the potential for a sub-regional development partnership with RSLs.

Local Priorities

Supporting People 5 Year Strategy 2005 - 2010

Supporting People is a partnership between Wiltshire County Council, the 4 District Councils, 3 Primary Care Trusts and the Probation Service.

The Supporting People Programme was implemented in April 2003 and currently funds over 370 services for vulnerable people in Wiltshire. This comprises of 4,700 units of supported accommodation and 550 units of floating support.

The Supporting People Partnership Board meets quarterly and has overall responsibility for the Supporting People programme, it comprises of officers and elected representatives from each of the partner organisations.

The Supporting People Officers Group is made up of officers from each organisation and meets monthly.

In addition to this officers from the partner organisations are involved in strategic service reviews. Services currently under review are Homelessness Services, Floating Support and services for Older People.

The Audit Commission judged the programme as “good with promising prospects for improvement” in a recent inspection.

The 5 year Strategy was recently submitted to the ODPM following approval by the Partnership Board. It sets out 5 strategic priorities for housing related support services in the county. These are:

- Enabling people to live independently and in their chosen home setting for as long as possible
- Using floating support instead of accommodation based services to break the automatic link between a tenancy and support and provide as much flexibility and choice as possible.
- Linking with our partners and other agencies to provide housing related support packages as part of integrated services
- Provide preventative housing related support services to minimise crises such as hospitalisation, institutional care, homelessness, social exclusion and re-offending
- Work with housing authorities, housing providers and voluntary agencies to ensure vulnerable people are supported to access housing advice and suitable accessible housing of their choice

For a full copy of the 5 Year Supporting People Strategy please contact the Supporting People Team on 01380 738018 or on the website at www.wiltshire.gov.uk . A copy of the Audit Commission’s report can be found at www.audit-commission.gov.uk

A Strategy for Wiltshire 2004 – 2014

The Wiltshire Strategic Board produced this strategy to make Wiltshire “a County fit for our children”. The Wiltshire Strategic Board is the county’s Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and this plan is the community strategy. The strategic board uses 8 policy themes. These are;

Social care and health
Countryside and land based issues
Housing and the built environment
Economy
Transport
Crime and community protection
Education, skills and learning
Culture

The Wiltshire Strategic Board works closely with the District's LSP and with community area partnerships sharing broad objectives to reduce duplication. One of the challenges identified in the community strategy is the lack of affordable housing in Wiltshire's towns and villages. The key targets and objectives of this strategy are reflected in the priorities identified in the Council's housing strategy, including reducing homelessness and increasing the supply of affordable housing.

For a full copy of A Strategy for Wiltshire 2004 – 2014 please contact David Maynard on tel. 01225 713000 or on the website at www.wiltshire.gov.uk

Partnership working

North Wiltshire District Council recognises that the corporate priorities cannot be delivered in isolation. We work with a variety of organisations to ensure that housing and related issues are addressed in order to deliver the priorities identified in the Corporate Plan.

We are therefore fully committed to partnership working and have worked hard to establish effective joint working for the benefit of the community.

Preferred Development Partnership

Providing affordable housing is a key priority for the District Council. The Council enables the development of affordable housing through working in partnership with local housing organisations. To ensure the District Council provides a co-ordinated and strategic approach to achieving its housing objectives and delivering its housing strategy, a preferred development arrangement was established in 2000. The Council recently invited bids to form a new partnership and, in July 2005, selected 5 local housing associations plus a small specialist rural provider to work with us to deliver new affordable housing in the District. These are: Westlea Housing Association, Sarsen Housing Association, The Guinness Housing Trust, Knightstone Housing Association and Sovereign Housing Association. We have also invited Wiltshire Rural Housing Association to become part of the partnership where specialist rural expertise is required. These Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) will form the basis of development activity in the District including working with developers on Section 106 and exceptions sites.

Wiltshire Development Officers' Group

This Wiltshire wide group meets quarterly to share good practice and discuss initiatives and funding opportunities. This group was instrumental in helping to put together the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance for North Wiltshire adopted in May 2004. The ability to share ideas and good practice, particularly in relation to negotiating s.106 agreements and developing new policies to help cope with the abolition of Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) has enabled the Council to continue to develop new affordable housing in the district at a reasonable rate. This group also helped to initiate work on a county-wide basis to assess the needs of gypsies and travellers and continues to share good practice in this area.

Wiltshire & Swindon Chief Housing Officers Group

This is a County-wide group of chief housing officers from each of the Wiltshire Local Authorities that meets quarterly to discuss the implications of new legislation and to share best practice. One notable achievement has been the joint funding of a county-wide Rural Housing Enabler who is working to identify rural housing needs and development sites and to improve delivery of affordable housing in rural areas.

Rural Affordable Housing Partnership Board

The partnership Board consists of representatives from all four Wiltshire local authorities and Swindon along with representatives from Community First (Wiltshire Rural Community Council), Country Landowners Association, Registered Social Landlords, the Housing

Corporation, Wiltshire Association of Local Councils and the Government Office for the South West. The Board clearly set out its terms of reference and aims and objectives to guide the Rural Housing Enabler.

The RHE works closely with the Council's enabling team to identify opportunities for development, promote awareness of affordable housing at parish meetings and maintain liaison with the Council's RSL partners.

M4 Corridor Group

This sub-regional group is involved in looking at the potential for commissioning a joint Housing Market Assessment. This partnership has also enabled the joint commissioning of a District Wide Housing Needs Survey, led by North Wiltshire District Council. The survey, completed in October 2005, has identified housing needs in both North Wiltshire and Swindon.

The group was also responsible for the production of an Affordable Home Ownership application form and is exploring the potential for operating Choice Based Lettings on a sub-regional basis and setting up a sub-regional Registered Social Landlord (RSL) development partnership.

Mental Health & Housing Co-ordinator Steering Group.

Representatives from Kennet District Council, North Wiltshire District Council and Health meet to steer the work of the Mental Health & Housing Co-ordinators. These posts have been jointly funded by Avon & Wiltshire Partnership and Kennet & North Wilts PCT and are hosted by the District Councils. There are currently two officers employed to serve the districts of Kennet and North Wiltshire. The steering group is currently considering an extension of the partnership into West Wiltshire. The role of these posts is to improve the strategic direction of the housing service for people with mental health needs and to provide support to individual customers to meet their housing needs.

Local Public Service Agreement 2 (LPSA 2)

As part of LPSA 2 the districts of Wiltshire in partnership with Wiltshire County Council proposed a target to provide better support for homeless 16 and 17 year olds in Wiltshire. The agreement involves officers from all Wiltshire District Councils, Social Services and Youth Offending Team. The target is to significantly reduce the number of 16 and 17 year olds placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation by 2008 and to eliminate the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for this age group. A project officer has been seconded to drive this project forward and report on progress to the LPSA 2 Group.

Housing Association Liaison Group

This group, consisting of representatives from Registered Social Landlords, Voluntary Organisations and the Supporting People team and led by the District Council, meets twice yearly to discuss current housing issues, including nominations and lettings, access to support, housing benefit and community safety issues.

Empty Properties Group

This Wiltshire-wide group meets quarterly to share good practice regarding empty homes. In particular, due to the limited availability of grant assistance, this group focuses on exploring innovative methods for encouraging owners to bring their properties back into use.

Wiltshire & Swindon Home Improvement Agencies

By working in partnership with local authorities, Social Services and Health Authorities, Wiltshire & Swindon Home Improvement agencies help older and disabled people to live independent lives by giving advice, improving their homes and making them more suited to their needs. The Agencies meet a variety of needs and create new services for the community. Ridgeway Care & Repair provide a co-ordinated service across North Wiltshire, West Wiltshire and Kennet.

For more information on Home Improvement Agencies please contact Tom McCutcheon on 01249 706305 or tmccutcheon@northwilts.gov.uk

Whole Systems Management Group

This district – wide group meets quarterly and is comprised of all the partners that are involved in the disabled adaptation process. This includes Council Grant Officers, Occupational Therapists, Client Agents, and Care & Repair (the Home Improvement Agency). The purpose of the group is to streamline the disabled adaptation process and ensure that all parties are working together to achieve the best outcome for the client.

It is a forum for addressing:

- 1) complex cases
- 2) delays in any part of the process
- 3) best practice and innovations
- 4) issues relating to available resources.

In June 2005 it was agreed to set up a smaller working group to explore alternatives options for clients and making better use of existing resources.

The group are initially focusing on:

- 1) Setting up an effective process for moving clients to more suitable accommodation rather than provide large scale adaptations such as a house extension.
- 2) More efficient ways of using existing resources.
- 3) Investigating use of modular buildings and ramps rather than just conventional extensions.

Housing Renewal Officer's Group

This group meets on a six weekly basis and is comprised of Private Sector Housing Officers from Swindon BC and each of the Wiltshire District Councils. The group meets to discuss all areas of Private Sector Renewal including;

- 1) New Legislation
- 2) Pressures on resources
- 3) Bench marking exercises
- 4) Best practice
- 5) Possibility of cross-county projects.

Currently the group are involved in:

- A. Exploring the possibility of setting up a county wide Loan & Equity Release Scheme
- B. Joint working on HMO (Houses in multiple occupation) licensing, new Health & Safety Rating System and other elements of the new Housing Act 2004.
- C. Exploring a pilot countywide procurement scheme.

Homelessness and Housing Advice

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced a new requirement for Local Authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy focused on the prevention of homelessness in their districts, and the provision of appropriate accommodation and support for households accepted as homeless under the Homelessness legislation.

This has given North Wiltshire District Council the opportunity to work with partners in taking a more strategic approach to address and prevent homelessness in the District. Partnership working has taken place through homelessness consultation days, joint production of the homelessness strategy, the homelessness strategy steering group and sub-groups set up to deliver specific initiatives e.g. a new drop-in centre in Chippenham and a working group to look at accommodation needs for single homeless people across Wiltshire.

Housing Advice

The Council has a contract with the Citizens Advice Bureau, (CAB) to provide housing advice that is free and independent. This service is available throughout the district through the CAB's offices in Chippenham and Calne. There are also surgeries in Corsham, Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett and, if necessary, home visits can be arranged.

Under the terms of this contract the CAB provide housing advice and assistance, debt counselling for rent or mortgage arrears and representation in Court for possession and eviction proceedings. They also assist and support clients who have requested a review of their homeless decision.

Northwilts CAB has been particularly successful in preventing homelessness, giving advice to 1001 clients between January and December 2004 and preventing homelessness in 92 cases.

The contract was due to end in January 2006 but will be extended to the end of March 2006 to enable the District Council to fully review the services provided under this contract to ensure that advice is provided in the most appropriate way, meets customer needs and continues to provide an efficient and effective, value for money service.

The Housing Team have also produced an advice leaflet, specifically aimed at young people and this was launched at the Youth Conference on 20th October. This, together with the work that is being planned with Connexions and the local schools, should have a significant impact on raising young people's awareness about homelessness.

Advice on homelessness is also available in leaflet form and on our website – www.northwilts.gov.uk

Homelessness Service

Our use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation, particularly for families, has reduced radically. In 2003/2004 the average length of time families spent in B&B was 9 weeks, however for 2004/2005 the ODPM target of no families in B&B for longer than 6 weeks was met and exceeded. In many cases the use of B&B is avoided altogether, but where this has been unavoidable, the average length of time a family spent in B&B in 2004/2005 was just 3 weeks.

This was brought about by both an increase in prevention work and the successful launch of the Housing Association Leasing Scheme which now enables the Homelessness Team to offer a range of temporary accommodation to homeless families in the District.

North Wiltshire District Council launched this scheme, in partnership with Westlea Housing Association and Sarsen Housing Association, in early 2004 and we now have over 30 appropriately sized, self-contained properties for use as temporary accommodation throughout the District. This initiative not only ensures that homeless households have a better quality of life while waiting for permanent housing, but also makes considerable savings on Bed & Breakfast and Housing Benefit expenditure.

Westlea Housing Association

In 1995 the District Council transferred its housing stock to Westlea Housing Association, a key partner of the local authority. It is the largest Registered Social Landlord (RSL) in the district and has 5724 properties at 1st April 2005. Westlea Housing Association also manages the Housing Needs Register on behalf of the District Council.

When the District Council has accepted a household as homeless, Westlea will either make an offer of one of their own properties or will make a nomination to one of the other Registered Social Landlords who have properties in the district.

Westlea Housing Association also owns and manages temporary hostel accommodation in Chippenham, 2 refuges for women fleeing domestic violence and provides floating support for tenants who are having problems maintaining their tenancies.

Single Homeless Temporary Accommodation Group

This group was established as a result of the Homelessness consultation day and was originally set up to explore the possibilities of Direct Access and Foyer services in the District. Working with partners from Supporting People, the voluntary sector, other District councils, supported housing providers and Connexions, the focus of the group has now been widened to include all temporary accommodation for single homeless people and has contributed to Supporting People's strategic review of homelessness services for single people.

Supporting People

We contribute to the county-wide Supporting People programme and have been closely involved their strategic review of services for example, the review and development of Home Improvement Agencies, to include, for the first time, a Home Improvement Agency in West Wiltshire. This has ensured that every resident in Wiltshire now has access to the services of a Home Improvement Agency.

Local Strategic Partnership and Community Plans

The District Council has been working in partnership with other organisations and community groups to identify what the people of North Wiltshire want and need and where actions and improvements are needed. The Community Partnerships team has produced five Community Plans and an over-arching Community Strategy. Eight key areas have been identified as vital to the social, economic and environmental well being of the District. All five Community plans identified the need for new affordable housing as a key area.

Consultation

Consultation with the community on the Council's priorities is essential in order to ensure that they are effective in addressing the needs of the District.

In a large rural area the feedback received from Parish Councils and voluntary organisations is especially important.

Housing Strategy 2005 – 2008

We have taken every opportunity to consult and involve our partners in the development of our Housing Strategy.

Regular consultation takes place on a range of issues, including housing, in "Improving North Wiltshire", a bi-annual newsletter sent to every household in the District. The Spring/Summer 2005 issue included details of our Housing Strategy consultation and invited views on housing priorities. This was also publicised on our website.

In addition, members of the housing team attended the 5 Area Committees to discuss the Housing Strategy and invite members and any residents present to vote on housing priorities.

The Housing Team also produced more detailed topic papers on: Affordable Housing, Sustainable Communities, Homelessness & Housing Advice, Private Sector Housing and Allocations and Choice Based Lettings. These were sent to Parish Councils, District Councillors, Registered Social Landlords, Statutory and Voluntary Organisations and other teams within the Council. The topic papers were also available on our website.

These were some of the comments that we received:

" Providing more affordable housing in rural locations e.g. the villages"

"There is a need for more low cost housing for purchase. This doesn't need new build but options to purchase existing first time buyer properties"

“Schemes to encourage those in the wrong sized housing (ie underoccupied) to move on”

“The homelessness issue needs a radical rethink to resolve the problem”

“ Keep single people out of B&B accommodation including the provision of a direct access hostel”

“High energy efficient housing that exceeds the current minimum specifications by a considerable margin”

“We are not in the business to provide an inheritance for people’s families”

As a result of this consultation we now have a clear idea of the community’s views of housing priorities in North Wiltshire:

Rank	Priority Area
1	Providing new affordable housing
2	Homelessness prevention
3	Empty homes
4	Housing with support
5	Home ownership
6	Disabled facilities grants
7	Energy efficiency
8	Sustainable communities
9	Improving existing housing
10	Establishing housing need
11	Housing advice
12	Choice based lettings

This feedback reinforces the consultation undertaken for the Community Plans which also identified affordable housing as a key area of concern throughout the District.

Following consultation on the priorities and topic papers a draft Housing Strategy was sent to our partners, stakeholders and made available on our website for a period of 8 weeks to enable residents, customers and other interested parties to comment. Some of the comments received were as follows:

“We....are glad to note the prominence that the Council is giving to housing issues and community building generally”

“The affordable housing provision of 100 homes per year should be more ambitious”

“I was pleased as I read through the strategy to see that the demands for affordable housing are being taken very seriously and you seem to have put firm plans in place to help people who are in need of assistance when buying their first home”

“You mentioned exception sites outside the framework of small settlements. Has there been any further work done on those without a framework boundary.”

“I am still slightly concerned that affordable houses only seem to be built in the towns such as Chippenham, Corsham and Calne.....I would like to see some affordable units built in

villages because it is even more expensive to purchase property here and so young residents are literally forced out of the villages into the towns.”

“I welcome the main thrust of this strategy. I believe it has gone a long way to answering the points of concern highlighted by the Audit Commission’s CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment) in January of this year.”

“There could be greater emphasis on environmentally friendly sustainable development, energy efficiency and the wider objective of an anti-poverty strategy in which high quality homes play a key role.”

“Brownfield sites should take first priority for development and should be exploited, however, whatever is proposed on a brownfield site should be in keeping with the surrounding area.”

“In terms of supporting people, it is identified that there are issues in supporting older people with mental health problems and that traditional sheltered accommodation is less popular with older people.”

“Perhaps more could be included regarding the needs of minority groups”

“Overall, a comprehensive and “reader-friendly” strategy report with clear priorities”

Further analysis of our Housing Strategy consultation, together with details of previous and planned consultation can be found in Appendix 3

Local Housing Needs Surveys

When researching housing needs in the District, households are sent a questionnaire to complete. This gives them the opportunity to voice their opinions about the local housing situation and what they feel is the future need in their area. The results of these surveys are used to inform priorities for future rural affordable housing development.

District-Wide Housing Needs Survey

A new District Wide Housing Needs Survey was carried out in 2005 and completed by the end of October. In conducting this survey key stakeholders were consulted on various issues of housing need, availability and affordability in the District. Issues raised included the lack of affordable housing, not enough Starter Homes, unmet need for supported housing for all client groups and a lack of appropriate temporary accommodation for single people.

Age Concern – Beyond the Immediate

This 18 month research project, jointly funded by the Supporting People Partnership, aims to address the needs of the over 50 population in Wiltshire. Phase 1 of the report, which looked at existing research data, was published in January 2005. This information will be used as the basis for Phase 2 of the project which will concentrate on questionnaires and individual interviews. The findings of this project will be invaluable in informing our priorities for services for older people.

Housing Association Leasing Scheme

In 2004 a Housing Association Leasing Scheme was set up in partnership with Sarsen Housing Association and Westlea Housing Association. This has enabled the Council to meet the ODPM target for families in B&B accommodations and, more importantly, to provide decent self contained temporary accommodation for homeless families in the District.

We are currently conducting a review of this service and have consulted all current and previous tenants of these schemes. One of the major concerns raised was the rental cost for those families not receiving Housing Benefit. This and other issues raised in the consultation will form the basis of our review and will help to shape the future service.

Homelessness Strategy 2003 – 2006

On 31 March 2003, the District Council held a Consultation Day. Representatives from other statutory agencies, Registered Social Landlords, the voluntary sector and service users were invited to the event. The purpose of the day was to work together to discover the issues facing homeless people in North Wiltshire and to generate ideas on partnership actions and processes to have the most positive impact in making a difference for people who were homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The consultation was held at the start of the strategy process, rather than when the review had been completed, as the District Council wanted to involve stakeholders from the very beginning, examining the core issues surrounding homelessness, identifying the support people facing homelessness needed and asking each of the participants what their personal commitment was to preventing homelessness and providing relevant and appropriate services.

In June 2004 a further Homelessness Consultation day was held, again with a large number of representatives from other statutory and voluntary organisations. The aim of this second event was to further develop the Homelessness Strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness in the District and to strengthen partnership working in order to deliver the Strategy.

As a result of this consultation a multi agency Homelessness Strategy Co-ordination Group was established to monitor the several working groups involved in improving services for homeless people in the District.

A further Consultation day is planned for early 2006.

Further details of both consultation days can be obtained from Jan Parry, Principal Housing Needs Officer on 01249 706321 or jparry@northwilts.gov.uk

What changes have we made following consultation?

Consultation	Feedback	Changes made
Housing Strategy consultation	Affordable Housing identified as the main priority	The provision of new affordable housing is the main priority in this

	<p>Target for new affordable homes could be more ambitious</p> <p>Need to ensure sufficient new affordable homes in rural areas Brownfield sites should take first priority for development</p> <p>There should be a greater emphasis on sustainable development</p> <p>Issues in supporting older people</p> <p>Need to do more to address the needs of minority groups</p>	<p>strategy</p> <p>Considering increasing the target number of new affordable homes per year through the corporate plan</p> <p>Will aim to ensure there is a mix of rural and urban new development</p> <p>The Council continues to exceed Government and regional targets for brownfield development</p> <p>New action to consider sustainability targets for new development.</p> <p>Aiming to set up an internal Energy Group to promote and co-ordinate energy and sustainability issues across the Council.</p> <p>Will continue to work in partnership with Housing Associations, Supporting People and the voluntary sector to assess and address the needs of older people</p> <p>New action to assess the needs of minority and hard to reach groups</p>
Local Housing Needs Surveys	Identifying a small but consistent affordable housing need in the district's rural villages to maintain their sustainability	Delivery of new affordable housing in rural areas is prioritised including continued support for the Rural Housing Enabler
District-Wide Housing Needs Survey	Identified need for direct access accommodation and more supported housing for single people.	We are working in partnership with Supporting People to provide emergency direct access accommodation as part of a supported scheme for single people with complex needs
Age Concern – Beyond the Immediate	Phase 1 of the research (evaluation of existing data) has identified a growing older population with increasingly higher	We will continue to work with partners to address the housing needs of older people including working with Westlea

	<p>expectations. Results of phase 2, 3 and 4, involving a postal survey and face to face questionnaires due to be available by March 2006</p>	<p>Housing Association to develop their Older Persons Housing Strategy and working with Supporting People on their review of services for older people.</p>
<p>Housing Association Leasing Scheme</p>	<p>Concerns were raised about the affordability of the accommodation</p>	<p>These concerns will form the basis of the review of the scheme and options to make the accommodation more affordable will be explored</p>
<p>Homelessness Strategy 2003</p>	<p>Identified a need for a Drop-in centre</p>	<p>Working group set up and project opened in January 2004</p>

Needs Analysis

The District Council has a number of measures in place to identify housing needs and this analysis forms the basis of future policy and strategies as part of the District Council's housing service.

District Wide Housing Needs Survey 2005

In December 2004, the District Council, in partnership with Swindon Borough Council, commissioned Fordham Research to undertake a District wide housing needs survey. The purpose of this major piece of housing research was to determine levels of housing supply and demand in the District, provide evidence to support funding bids and to enable the Council to negotiate and secure more affordable housing on private development sites.

The study was designed to assess the future requirements for both affordable and market housing. To do this the study drew on a number of sources of information. These included:

- i) A postal survey of 1,109 local households
- ii) Personal interviews with a further 252 households
- iii) Interviews with local stakeholders
- iv) Interviews with local estate and letting agents
- v) Review of secondary data (including Land Registry, Census and H.I.P. data)

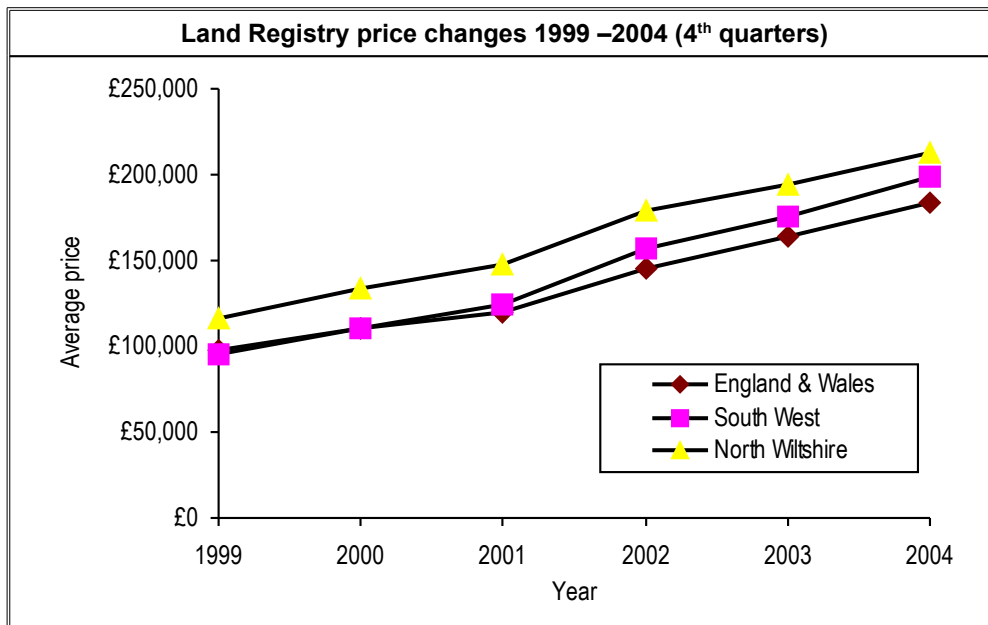
Main Findings

1. There is an estimated shortfall of affordable housing in the district of around 780 units per year.
2. The greatest shortfall is in one and two bedroomed property and in the Chippenham sub-area.
3. It would be difficult to justify an affordable housing target below 40% and a threshold above 10 dwellings
4. At most 40% of the affordable housing should be for shared ownership with the remainder social rented.
5. In the owner occupied sector there is an overall shortfall of provision which is most acute for two bedroom accommodation with a surplus of four bedroom accommodation.
6. 11.1% of households contain people with support needs with over half of those households having a physical disability.

House Prices

With an average increase of 4.27% in house prices in the South West in the past year (source: The Land Registry), buying a property on the open market for local households has become increasingly difficult.

Prices in North Wiltshire rose by 83.6% in the period 1999 to 2004. This is slightly below the rate of increase observed both nationally and regionally. However, the average property price in North Wiltshire in the 4th quarter 2004 was around 16% higher than the average for England & Wales.

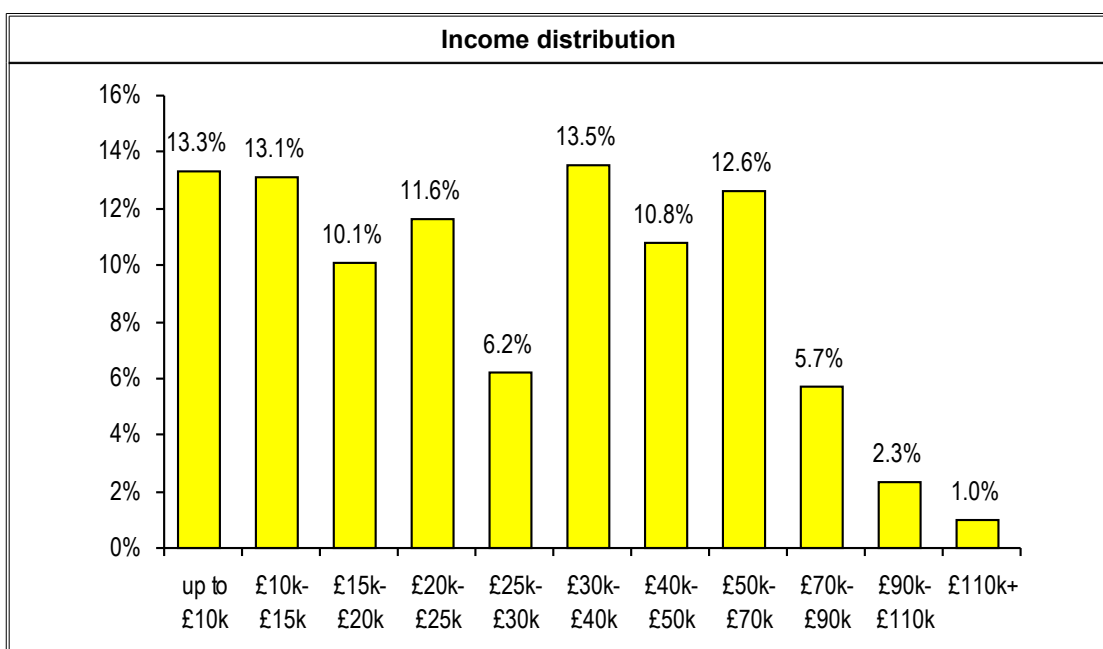


Using information gathered from the district-wide housing needs survey May 2005, it was established that the lowest price for a two bedroom house in the district was £127,000

The household income needed to purchase such a house would be £43,793 per year. This is calculated by dividing the price of the property by 2.9 (A household containing more than one adult is not eligible for a mortgage if the household income multiplied by 2.9 is less than the cost of the mortgage requirement)

The survey estimates that mean annual gross household income (including benefits) in North Wiltshire is £34,951. However, the average conceals wide variations among different tenure groups with households in social rented housing showing average incomes significantly below the District average.

As illustrated by this table, over 50% of the population have an average household income of less that £30,000 and are unable to afford the least expensive 2 bedroom property in the District.



The following table shows the percentage of households, by tenure, who are unable to afford market housing.

Table 6.2 Affordability and tenure			
Tenure	Affordability		
	Unable to afford market housing	Number of h'holds	% of h'holds unable to afford
Owner-occupied (no mortgage)	334	16,664	2.0%
Owner-occupied (with mortgage)	1,879	24,924	7.5%
RSL	5,866	6,676	87.9%
Private rented	2,918	5,236	55.7%
TOTAL	10,997	53,500	20.6%

The lowest rental price for a three-bedroom house in the District was found to be £615 per month and for a two-bedroom house it was £525 per month.

Using the definition that “a household is unable to afford private rented housing if renting privately would take up more than 25% of its gross household income”, more than 54% and 48% respectively of households in the District would not be able to afford to rent such houses.

Local Needs Surveys

The Council operates a 5-year rolling programme of Local Housing Needs Surveys across the district working in partnership with Parish and Town Councils. These are carried out both in-house and in partnership with the Rural Housing Enabler and provide accurate and up to date information on housing need in market towns and villages across North Wiltshire. They therefore help to facilitate rural housing development. It is a prime objective for the Council that it should have housing need information for all of its Parishes, which is no more than 5 years old.

In 2004/2005 local needs survey were completed in Nettleton, Leigh, Lea and Cleverton, Calne Without, Little Somerford, Compton Bassett, Biddestone and Slaughterford and Kington Langley.

In 2005/6 local needs surveys have been completed in Castle Combe, Oaksey, Heddington and Marston Meysey. There are currently 2 surveys underway in Seagry and Christian Malford and there are more planned later in the year.

Housing Stock Condition Survey

Stock condition surveys as a means of identifying housing stock condition have long been recognised as an essential part of housing strategy development. The government undertakes a national five yearly house condition survey and imposes a statutory duty on councils to review conditions annually.

A house condition survey allows the Council to monitor its housing strategy and policies in the light of legislative and other related changes. It allows the Council to review its strategy for meeting the requirements of HECA.

The survey results identify the extent of existing problems in the housing stock and indicate the level of resource needed to make an impact.

This survey was carried out internally using staff employed by the Council, during 2003/4. It included the production of a sample of 1500 property addresses and all properties were sub-defined into the five established areas of the District. 1025 addresses were visited in total and this figure is used as a basis for analysis.

Main Findings

- Across all sub areas the predominant property age is for post 1982 dwellings with the exception of Corsham where property was predominantly built during the 1945 to 1975 period. The majority of the earliest property is found within the Malmesbury sub area. Across the district as a whole, only 18% of dwellings are pre 1919.
- Traditional houses, accounting for 90.0% of the stock, dominate North Wiltshire's stock. The remainder of the stock in North Wiltshire comprises a mix of non-traditional build and flats. The profiles for the sub areas almost exactly mirror the profile for the District as a whole.
- There are estimated 620 empty dwellings (1.17%) in the district. They are distributed amongst those awaiting sale (0.29%), those being modernised (0.39%), those being newly vacant (0.29%), those being mid term vacant (0.10%) and those classified as being long term vacant (0.10%). It is worth noting that those awaiting sale, those being modernised and those newly vacant comprise the major share of vacant dwellings across the district. The mid and long-term vacant dwellings comprise just 0.2% of the district stock total

For key points from the Stock Condition Survey, please contact Tom McCutcheon, Principal Private Sector Housing Officer on 01249 706305 or tmccutcheon@northwilts.gov.uk

Supporting People

The Partnership's approach to collecting needs information for the 5 year strategy has been to work jointly with partner agencies and to use existing data to ensure a consistent approach

across Wiltshire. It is acknowledged that there are gaps in terms of the needs information which is available, therefore data will continue to be collected on an ongoing basis to ensure that services are provided based on need. Needs information collected has identified the following gaps in services in Wiltshire:

- Little provision for frail elderly people or older people with mental health problems, including dementia and other mental health problems
- No support provision for homeless families other than in hostels. Floating support is often not available in temporary accommodation.
- People with complex needs are excluded from many supported housing services. There is a need for short term services providing intensive support for this client group
- Uneven provision across the county for people with learning difficulties
- Traditional sheltered housing is becoming less popular with older people
- Little provision across the county for young people at risk
- Support is linked to specific accommodation in many services and does not allow for flexibility
- No direct access hostels in Wiltshire
- Not all SP services provided are based on need
- Inequitable supply of support services to owner occupiers in all client groups
- Lack of focus on preventative services
- Lack of consistent move-on arrangements from short term services or equitable access to resettlement support
- Opportunities for joint commissioning have not been identified or progressed
- Lack of strategic direction to services around prioritising referrals and outcomes required

Housing Needs Register

Westlea Housing Association, on behalf of the District Council, manages a register of people who have applied to the Council for housing. The Housing Needs Register provides us with information about the numbers of people in housing need in the District and the areas in which they are seeking accommodation. This information, together with other indicators of housing need as described in this chapter, can help to direct the Council's development strategy.

There are 1352 general needs applicants seeking accommodation (as at May 2005). The Table below shows the number of general needs applicants on the Housing Needs Register and the size of property needed.

Total No. of General Needs Applicants on Housing Needs Register

	04/04	05/04	06/04	07/04	08/04	09/04	10/04	11/04	12/04	01/05	03/05	04/05	05/05
1 Bed	686	703	713	715	733	752	756	762	778	707	679	701	706
2 Bed	351	360	364	346	355	374	369	368	370	374	380	394	395
3 Bed	211	210	214	219	225	240	256	259	271	243	241	196	194
4 Bed	61	61	61	57	59	63	67	67	63	59	59	55	57
Total	1309	1334	1352	1337	1372	1429	1448	1456	1482	1383	1359	1346	1352

Homelessness

Levels of homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation are a good indication of housing need. In 2004/05 the Council received applications from 581 homeless applicants. Under housing legislation the Council had a duty to provide permanent accommodation to 251 of these, the majority of which were housed in social housing.

The Council has a duty to re-house homeless applicants who are in a priority group and are not intentionally homeless. The priority group are:

- Households with dependent children or someone who is pregnant
- Anyone who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental health problems, physical disability or illness
- Anyone who has become homeless in an emergency

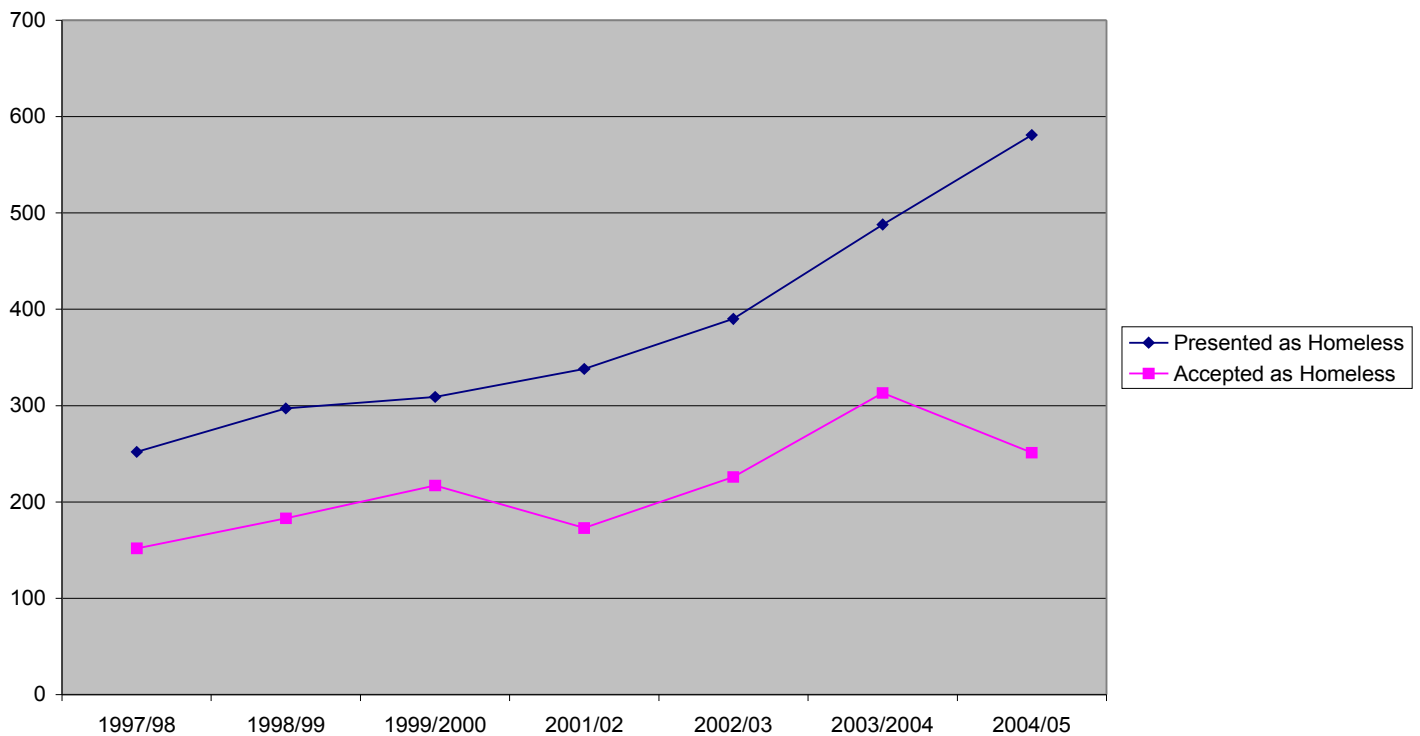
The Homelessness Act 2002 added the following groups to the priority categories:

- 16 and 17 year olds (unless the responsibility of Social Services)
- Care leavers aged 18 to 21
- Anyone who is vulnerable as a result of fleeing violence, having served in the Armed Forces, having served a prison sentence or having been in Care

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002 and the production of our first Homelessness Strategy, the Council has become more proactive in the prevention of homelessness and in keeping the length of stay in temporary accommodation to a minimum.

The graph below illustrates the decrease in the number of homeless acceptances as a result of our increased focus on the prevention of homelessness in the District.

Presentations V Acceptances 1997 to 2005



Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Needs

Using the standards set by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the District Council is currently undertaking an assessment on all aspects of services across the Council to ensure that they comply with the CRE's statutory standards. This involves an overview of all of the services and a programme to implement appropriate measures that promote good practice, eliminate discrimination, and ensure equal opportunities. The District Council implemented a Race Equality Scheme on May 31st 2002, which included an action plan to deliver the requirements of the Racial Equality Amendment Act 2000. The Racial Equality Council for Wiltshire is assisting the District Council in this process. From this analysis, the Council will be able to identify any specialist Black and Minority Ethnic housing needs and intends in future years to prioritise any developments.

There is a "Language Line" telephone line available for clients whose first language is not English and who access the North Wiltshire Citizen's Advice Bureau's Housing Advice Line. This line provides a translation service. It has not been needed for any enquiries for housing advice.

BME communities make up 1.7% of the population of North Wiltshire (National Census 2001, ONS). Over the last three years a total of 1357 homelessness applications were made to the District Council of which 26 were from the BME community; these represent 1.92% of the total number of applications. 11 of these 26 clients were found to be not homeless and the full duty was accepted for 12. The picture in North Wiltshire, therefore, does not reflect the national situation, where people from BME communities are over represented in homeless acceptances.

During the past two years 40 people from the BME communities approached North Wiltshire CAB for housing advice, 2.16% of the total number of 1854 enquiries.

The number of clients in the BME group on the housing register represents 1.7% of the waiting list population.

North Wiltshire District Council will continue working with Wiltshire Racial Equality Council and other organisations to ensure that BME communities are aware of the homelessness and housing advice services available in the District.

Gypsies and Travellers

There is currently a lack of specific needs information about gypsies and travellers therefore the District Council have allocated financial resources to research the needs of this particular group. A county-wide group has been set up to formulate a brief and jointly tender for this research led by North Wiltshire District Council. The target date for completion is July 2006. The research will be carried out in three phases. The first phase will be desk top research collating what we already know from caravan counts, details of unauthorised encampments, enforcement action against unauthorised developments, number of existing authorised sites, both public and private and details of waiting lists for existing sites. The second phase will involve face to face interviews with the gypsy and traveller community to gather details regarding their needs. The third phase will involve formulating criteria for the selection of suitable sites to meet the needs of gypsies and travellers.

Resources

In addition to financial resources the resources available to the Council include assets, staffing and equipment such as Information Technology. The Council can also use the planning system to ensure it makes best use of any potential community gain through planning permissions.

Funding

Our spending is divided between capital investment and revenue budgets. Capital investment covers one-off items of spending, such as housing development. The Revenue budget funds recurring expenditure such as service provision or staff costs.

Capital

Councils fund capital expenditure from grants, contributions from third parties, proceeds from the sale of assets (capital receipts) revenue income and borrowing. The Council's Capital Strategy aims to ensure that capital investment provides optimum benefit to the people of North Wiltshire in accordance with its vision, aims and priorities.

In 1995, the District Council transferred its housing stock to Westlea Housing Association and received a capital receipt of £55 million. The Council used part of this receipt to pay off its debts and became a debt free Authority.

Capital for New Affordable Housing

Prior to April 2003, the Council had planned to spend £3m per year to subsidise the provision of 100 new affordable homes annually. This capital funding (Local Authority Social Housing Grant – LASHG) was committed via the Housing Corporation who then reimbursed the Council, thereby allowing the recycling of the money into other capital schemes, for example leisure facilities.

In April 2003, LASHG was abolished and debt-free councils were no longer able to recycle funding in this way. The Council therefore had to revise its capital funding programme to ensure that a reasonable level of development could be maintained.

In February 2004, the Executive Committee took the decision to commit £2m per year from capital reserves to fund our development programme in the medium term.

In addition to this funding is also available from the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP) However, the Council is working with its Registered Social Landlord partners to identify different ways of providing affordable housing without recourse to public subsidy. This will reduce the amount of funding required in order to provide more affordable housing in the future.

Capital Funding - Private Sector Renewal

Spend on Housing Renewal in North Wiltshire from 2000/01 to 2005/06

	Year	Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)	Renovation Grant	Small Works	Total
Budget Amt	2005/06	£780,000	£70,000	£50,000	£900,000
Actual Spend	2004/05	£536,000	£69,000	£57,000	£662,000
Actual Spend	2003/04	£469,000	£92,000	£99,000	£660,000
Actual Spend	2002/03	£333,000	£73,000	£93,000	£493,000
Actual Spend	2001/02	£423,000	£91,000	£134,000	£648,000
Actual Spend	2000/01	£350,000	£108,000	£135,000	£593,000

The Capital budget for Housing Renewal for 2005/06 is split as follows:

- £770,000 for mandatory disabled adaptations
- £10,000 for discretionary disabled adaptations
- £70,000 for renovation grants which comprises of £40,000 to bring back 5 unfit properties back to a habitable standard (BVPI62) and £30,000 to bring 5 empty properties back into use (BVPI 64)
- £50,000 for small-works to help achieve the national target of ensuring that 70% of vulnerable households in the private sector are living in decent homes by 2010 & assisting the more vulnerable carry out essential repairs to their properties.

There has been increasing pressure on the Housing Renewal Budget in all areas but most notably in the area of Disabled Adaptations. In May 2005 the Council reviewed the numbers awaiting adaptations, together with the average number of new requests per month and concluded that additional funding would be necessary on top of the original budget of £480,000.

In July 2005, the Housing Portfolio Holder presented a report to the Council Executive highlighting the pressures on the current budget and on future adaptation budgets. The report outlined the increasing need within the district for disabled adaptations as evidenced by the initial draft of the District Wide Housing Needs Survey 2005.

Council members responded by awarding a further £300,000 to help improve the lives of disabled households within the District.

The Council is aware that with the success of other national policies such as Care in the Community (i.e. the move away from institutionalised care to care being provided in the home) plus an ageing population, that the need for such adaptations is likely to increase in the future. This will have major implications for future capital budgets.

To counteract the pressure on the capital budget, the Council has instigated a number of alternative measures.

These include:

- Pooling the resources of all the parties involved in the DFG process ie Social Services, Housing Associations & the District Council
- Working with the Home Improvement Agency Care & Repair to secure procurement discounts

- Supporting the setting up of a separate property register detailing adapted properties and allocating them accordingly.
- Supporting and encouraging the recycling of stairlifts.
- In cases where large scale adaptations might be necessary, working on alternative ways to help disabled households such as moving to more suitable accommodation that would only require small adaptations.
- Looking to use modular building technology instead of the conventional extensions that can be re-used when no longer required by the initial client.

Alongside this the Council is hopeful that the current government Disabled Facilities Grant review will address issues such as:

- Balancing increasing needs of the community with availability of resource.
- Ensuring the best use of resource such as recycling of grant monies (eg repayment of grant monies in circumstance where value has been added to the property by the adaptation such as a house extension and where the household has decided to sell the property and move elsewhere).

Outside the spectrum of Disabled Adaptations the Council also provides grant assistance to vulnerable households for:

- A) Essential repairs
- B) Installation of energy efficiency measures.
- B) Bringing Empty Properties back into use.
- C) Bringing unfit properties back to a habitable standard.

At present assistance is mainly through the provision of grants and a small amount of enforcement. However in the future, with funding for grants less likely to be available, the Council is exploring the options of equity release and loan schemes as well as increasing its enforcement action.

Total Capital Spending on Housing

Funding	Spend 03/04 (£)	Spend 04/05 (£)	Forecast Spend 05/06 (£)	Forecast Spend 06/07 (£)	Forecast Spend 07/08 (£)
Social Housing Grant (local authority)	0	376,000	3,686,973	2,000,000	2,000,000
Approved Development Programme*	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Disabled Facilities Grants	469,000	536,000	780,000	700,000	700,000
Private Sector Renewal Grants	191,000	126,000	120,000	150,000	150,000

TOTAL					
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* Awaiting figures from the Housing Corporation

Revenue

The Housing Revenue budget is financed by Council Tax, Business Rates, Fee Charges, Rents and through the Revenue Support Grant from Central Government. The District Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is a plan for future years' revenue budgets. It is reviewed on an annual basis in line with corporate priorities.

Revenue Spending (excluding staffing costs)

The table below illustrates the amount of revenue funding allocated by the Council to housing services excluding staffing and support costs.

Housing Service	Spend 2003/04 (£)	Spend 04/05 (£)	Forecast Spend 05/06	Forecast Spend 06/07	Forecast Spend 07/08
Strategic Housing	22,375	23,297	29,400	27,000	23,900
Homelessness services *	95,381	(15,624)	21,535	22,500	22,500
Housing Advice	91,745	94,755	96,020	97,000	98,000
Private Sector Housing	47,100	47,100	48,150	49,000	50,000
Housing Needs Register	50,000	51,300	51,300	53,000	54,000
Enabling & Research	0	25,007	22,300	20,000	20,000

* The spend on homelessness services reflects spend net of income from Housing Benefits. Consequently, although there was a net spend of £95,381 in 2003/04 a substantial proportion of this was due to delayed benefits payments. These caught up through 2004/05 hence the apparent surplus.

The Decision Making Process

The annual budget setting process runs alongside the development of the corporate plan and aims to ensure resources are aligned to the priorities identified in the plan. The timetable for delivering the budget and the Corporate plan for 2006/07 is illustrated in the table shown at Appendix 8. This shows how members are involved in the identification of corporate priorities. These are then balanced with priorities identified by the community through community plans and the community strategy, stakeholder consultation, national and regional priorities and legislation.

Budget proposals for the forthcoming year are then closely aligned to the priorities identified in the corporate plan again through consultation with members and stakeholders. Continuous review takes place throughout the year as the corporate plan gets delivered and progress is reported quarterly to Executive and Overview & Scrutiny Committees. Spend against budget projections is also reported quarterly to Finance and Performance Management Sub-Committee and monthly to Corporate Management Board.

Homelessness Funding

In 2003 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister provided funding to Local Authorities to assist in delivering their Homelessness Strategy. For 2003/2004 the grant was £25,000 and was used to fund research into the feasibility of a homelessness drop-in centre, and to underwrite the Housing Association Leasing Scheme.

Following a successful bid for 2004/2005, this grant was increased to £40,000 and has enabled the Housing Team to increase the Rent Deposit Scheme and to second another Homelessness Officer in order to focus on the prevention of homelessness in the District.

Land

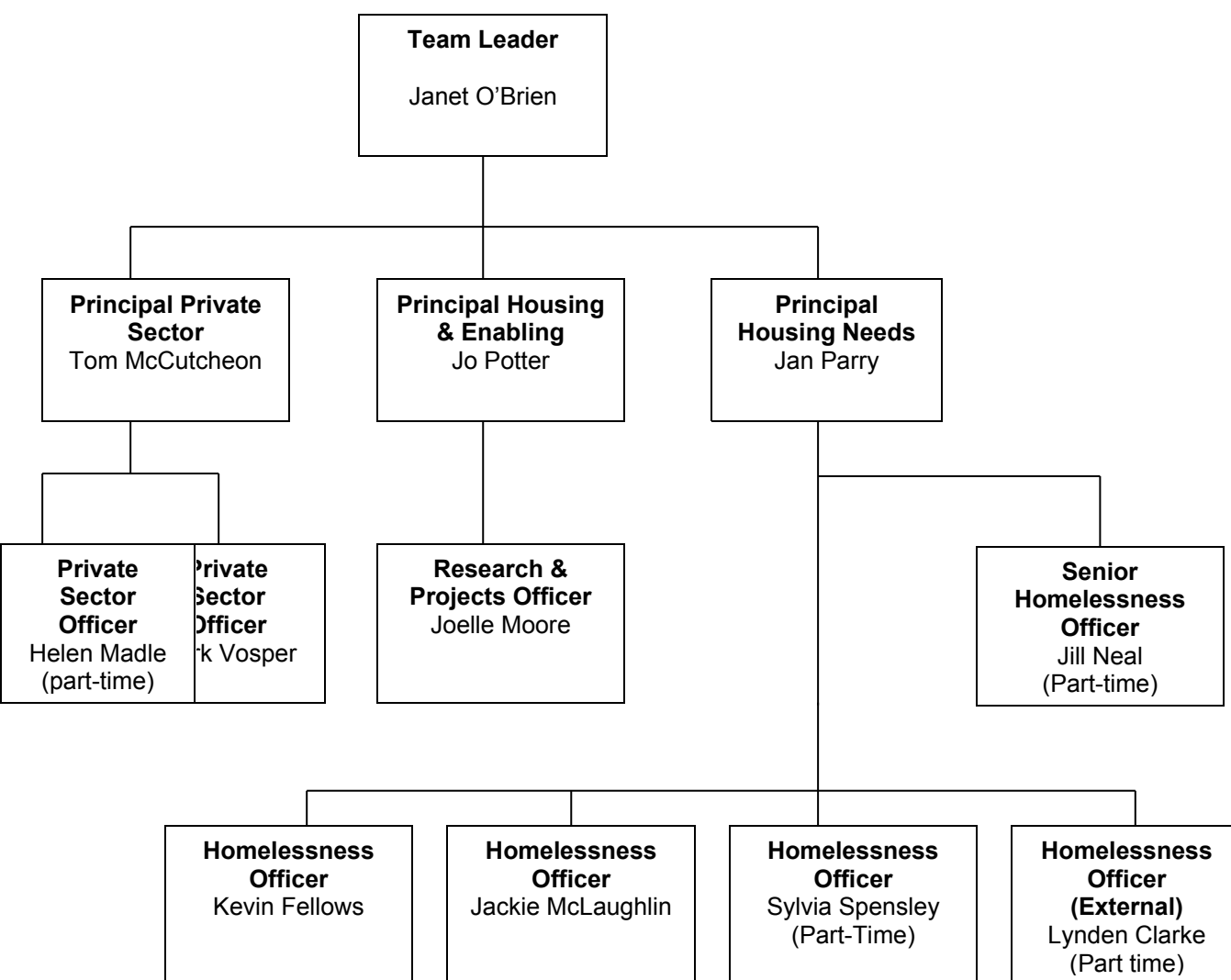
North Wiltshire District Council does not hold large areas of land for development. However, when the Council is considering disposal of sites, the consideration of affordable housing need in the area is always taken into account. Recently, for example, Executive agreed to dispose of two adjacent sites to one of our RSL partners in order to facilitate a mixed tenure scheme providing housing for sale, shared ownership housing and affordable housing to rent. This will be a grant-free scheme as the subsidy for the affordable housing will be provided from the surplus generated from the housing for sale profits. In addition, a small project team has been involved in evaluating the small pockets of land the Council owns which could have some development potential. Of the 76 small sites available in the District, 30 have been identified as potentially being able to assist in delivering our housing priorities and are being progressed in partnership with local Registered Social Landlords.

Human Resources

In order to provide a good service to the community, the District Council recognises the importance of the quality of its employees. In the Housing Team, good technical and communication skills are essential in providing customers with the support and assistance they require.

In 2004 the Community & Environment Business Area was re-organised in order to focus on our Corporate Priorities. Following extensive consultation with officers and members, the structure below was introduced. However, this may be reviewed if it becomes evident that there are not enough resources available to deliver our Housing Strategy.

HOUSING TEAM STRUCTURE



Information Technology (I.T.)

The work of the housing team is very reliant on I.T. resource. A new system for managing the work of the private sector team has been installed during the summer of 2005. This will enable better recording of information and provision of statistics to enable more effective future planning. In addition, we are now seeking to improve the system we use to monitor and manage information within the homelessness team. This again will ensure we are able to access reports and use statistical information more effectively to plan for better service provision in the future.

The Planning System

Making best use of the planning system is essential in order to achieve the maximum amounts of new affordable housing within the district to meet identified local need. New Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance was adopted by the Council in May 2004. This

ensures that 30% of all new development on sites over 25 units is affordable and is provided without recourse to public subsidy. The new Local Plan 2011, currently going through inquiry stage, will ensure that the threshold is reduced to 15 units in urban areas and that there is no threshold for rural sites. In addition, the rural policy allows for 50% affordable housing on all sites where there is an identified need. These policy updates have been achieved through close working with planning colleagues as well as our RSL partners and local authority neighbours.

Other Initiatives

Alongside the traditional resources the Council has at its disposal we are also working closely with our partners and neighbouring authorities to look at new ways of providing services in a more efficient and cost effective way. These include looking at using equity release and/or loan schemes for people in need of improvements to their homes who are income poor but asset rich. This will ensure they are able to release resources to fund improvements and make sure they live in decent housing without relying on public funding. Other initiatives include looking at alternative ways of providing temporary accommodation through leasing private sector properties. This is a much more effective way of using the Council's revenue funding as it is cheaper than alternatives such as Bed and Breakfast accommodation. It also provides a much better standard of accommodation. As detailed above we are also working with our partners to find ways of providing new affordable housing without the need for public subsidy. These are just a few of the new initiatives we have either introduced or are planning to introduce in order to make best use of available resource.

Priorities and Options for Delivery

This section identifies our priorities and proposed actions to deliver and improve housing services in the District. The main housing priorities set by the Council are a reflection of:

- National, Regional and Sub-Regional Priorities
- Our Corporate Priorities
- The housing need identified
- Consultation with partners, stakeholders and the community
- The resources available

The District Council’s 2020 vision for housing is “To ensure decent housing for everyone”. We are aiming to achieve this by:

- Maximising the opportunities for a decent home for everyone
- Agreeing a way forward to continue to develop new affordable housing in the District.

The reasons for the high priority of housing in the District Council are that house prices are high, local people rate housing services as a high priority and we have mandatory responsibilities for some housing services. We also recognise that we need innovative schemes to provide affordable housing and that we need to focus on preventing homelessness and making best use of existing stock including bringing empty homes back into use.

The tables below show each of our 3 priorities:

Priority	Corporate Priority	Needs Evidence	Consultation Feedback
Priority 1 Affordable housing	Helps to meet the Council’s 2020 vision of decent housing for everyone.	District wide housing needs survey has identified that 780 affordable homes are needed each year to meet current and future needs.	Community plans in each of the five areas of the District have identified affordable housing as a key priority.
National, Regional and Sub-Regional Priority	Helps to create sustainable communities, particularly in rural areas.	251 households were accepted as homeless in 2004/05 and there are 1352 people on the General Housing Needs Register.	Consultation with the Area Committees placed affordable housing as the top priority.
	Development brings economic prosperity to the District	House prices rose by 83.6% between 1999 and 2004 and are 16% higher than	The young people’s council have highlighted the need for affordable housing to enable young people to stay in the area.
	Community Strategy highlighted the need for affordable		Consultation for the

	<p>housing, especially for vulnerable people.</p> <p>Housing is one of the Corporate Priorities</p>	<p>the national average.</p> <p>Over half of the households in the District are unable to afford to buy the least expensive properties in the District</p> <p>There are around 500 empty properties in the District</p>	<p>District Wide Housing Needs Survey highlighted the lack of affordable homes in the District</p>
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Priority	Corporate Priority	Needs Evidence	Consultation Feedback
<p>Priority 2</p> <p>Reduce Homelessness</p> <p>National, Regional and Sub-Regional Priority</p>	<p>Helps to meet the Council's 2020 vision of decent housing for everyone.</p> <p>Community Strategy highlighted the need for affordable housing, especially for vulnerable people</p> <p>Housing is one of the Corporate Priorities</p>	<p>251 people were accepted as homeless in 2004/2005</p> <p>There were 68 homeless households in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2005.</p>	<p>Consultation for our Housing Strategy ranked the prevention of homelessness as 2nd overall.</p> <p>Homelessness Strategy Consultation highlighted the need to "explore innovative ways to prevent and tackle homelessness".</p>

Priority	Corporate Priority	Needs Evidence	Consultation Feedback
<p>Priority 3</p> <p>Improve Private Sector Housing</p> <p>National, Regional and Sub-Regional</p>	<p>Helps to meet the Council's 2020 vision of decent housing for everyone.</p> <p>Community Strategy highlighted the need for affordable housing, especially</p>	<p>The 2003/04 Housing Stock Condition Survey identified that 2% of dwellings were unfit and a further 7.6% were seriously defective</p> <p>Home Energy Conservation Act</p>	<p>Energy efficiency and Disabled Facilities Grants were identified as priorities in our Housing Strategy consultation.</p> <p>Care & Repair Customer Satisfaction Survey – has</p>

Priority	for vulnerable people Housing is one of the Corporate Priorities	returns Older Person's Strategy Applications for grants Stock condition survey There are around 500 empty properties in the district DWHNS identified that 11.1% of households contain people with support needs of which more than half have a physical disability.	recorded a very high satisfaction level with the service
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Priority 1 – Affordable Housing

With house prices in North Wiltshire being 16% higher than the average for England and Wales and over 50% of the population unable to afford the least expensive 2 bedroomed house, increasing the supply of affordable housing must be our top priority. However there are several options available in which to meet this priority. Each of these options is examined and prioritised below:

Option 1 – Affordable housing through planning gain

With high levels of housing need in the district and fairly restricted development opportunities, the use of the planning system to deliver affordable housing is becoming a very important method of enabling social housing. Private developers are required to provide an element of affordable housing on some sites, dependant on the size of the site and the total number of units being built. These units are transferred to one of our Preferred Partner RSLs who then own and manage the properties.

Since 2001, 129 new build units of affordable housing have been provided in North Wiltshire through the planning system. In the period of this Housing Strategy, up to 2008, there are around 400 new units in the pipeline that will be provided through the planning system. Our

existing Local Plan policies have been reasonably successful in delivering affordable housing however there is still a high deficit in provision compared to the 780 units required per year to meet the need according to the District Wide Housing Needs Survey 2005. In fact, the total yearly allocation of new housing development in the district is only around 800 units.

Our new Local Plan, which is currently at inquiry stage, increases the affordable housing requirement by reducing the threshold for the size of sites where an affordable housing requirement will be made. Once the new Local Plan 2011 is in place, a 30% contribution will be sought from developers where the site is in an urban area and is either larger than 0.5 hectare or where a total of 15 or more units are being built. There will also be a requirement for around 50% of any development in rural areas to be provided as social housing. It is also a requirement that these units should be provided without recourse to public subsidy.

This option is likely to make an increasingly significant impact to meeting the need in the district over the next few years. However, as land supply and development opportunities are becoming more limited due to proposals to concentrate new development in Principal Urban Areas (PUAs), the planning system may produce less units over time.

Option 2 – Social housing built with grant

Following the abolition of LASHG in 2003, we have been able to commit £2 million of our capital funding per year to grant fund development ourselves. This commitment is provisionally set from 2004/05 up to 2007/08, a total of £6 million over the 3 years. This funding is allocated to our Preferred Partner RSLs to enable them to take up development opportunities or, for some sites where the s.106 agreement was negotiated some time ago and where there is a requirement for subsidy, to fund sites gained through the planning system.

In addition to our own capital funding, the district also attracts around £1 million of grant funding each year from the Housing Corporation. RSLs are therefore able to obtain funding from either the Housing Corporation, our capital resources, or by joint funding with a mixture of both. In addition, RSLs are able to contribute Recycled Capital Grant Funding (RCGF) from their own resources which makes a valuable contribution to funding new affordable housing in the district.

Option 3 – Cross subsidising affordable homes with private market housing

This method of providing affordable housing avoids or reduces the need for grant by the RSL developing units both for social housing and for private sale. The profit generated by the sale of the units on the open market is used to subsidise the cost of providing social housing units. Westlea Housing Association is piloting this option to provide 5 units of social housing in the district on a site owned by the Council and disposed of to the RSL at below market value. The development is currently in early stages and it will be useful to evaluate the success of this scheme as it proceeds. This option is not likely to result in the provision of a high number of new units as RSLs will need to compete for sites with developers. However it is likely to be an option that works particularly well in rural areas or on small to medium size sites. For an RSL to be able to take on a cross-subsidy scheme, they will need to be able to commit significant financial resources up-front.

Option 4 – Make best use of land resources

The Council is working closely with the district's Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) RSL, Westlea Housing Association to make best use of land assets in the ownership of both organisations. This is particularly beneficial where there are two adjacent sites which would have little potential for development on their own but together are able to release land

resource for affordable housing development. The housing team is also working closely with colleagues in our asset management team and planning team to progress such sites where possible.

Option 4 – Making the best use of existing stock

Due to the high level of need and the comparatively low level of new build development that will be achievable, it is important that we make sure that the existing stock in the district is used in the best way possible. This can be achieved in a number of ways

- Making existing housing more suitable for its occupants through adaptations and improvements
- Bringing empty properties back into use
- Discouraging owners from keeping second homes through reducing council tax discounts
- Encouraging those whose needs are not being met in their existing property to move to more suitable housing where possible thereby releasing accommodation for others. For example, those needing adapted property or those underoccupying larger properties.
- Encouraging those occupying affordable housing who are able to access owner occupation to move into the owner occupied sector through initiatives such as homebuy
- Initiatives such as offering rent deposits and rent in advance to homeless households in temporary accommodation to enable access to the private rented sector

Option 5 – Private Finance Initiative

The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) is a method of procurement used to attract private finance into the public sector. It has been widely used in health, education and highways but has only recently started to be used to fund affordable housing.

Under the PFI scheme, the capital costs of constructing new-build homes or refurbishing existing private sector homes are wholly funded using private finance. The Council will then pay an annual amount of revenue funding over 30 years to the contractor to support the revenue costs of the new homes. The revenue funding is subsidised by the ODPM, through PFI credits.

This option is one that we have been considering carefully. If we decide to bid for PFI funding, we will need to be prepared to commit both internal and external resources to putting a bid together. There is a lot of time and resource required to put a bid together and it is estimated that from the point of getting selected to having to submit an Outline Business Case to the ODPM will take around 6 or 7 months. This process will involve considerable up-front expense in appointing advisors/consultants. The Government Agency, whose role is to enable Local Authorities to engage in public private partnerships, advises that the Local Authority should set aside around £350,000 to fund this work. The up-front expense of applying for PFI funding could be money well spent if the bid was successful, however it is a large amount of funding to commit without any guarantee that it will result in new units being provided. There are other risks such as not bringing forward sufficient land supply and the contract costing more than originally anticipated which have to be weighed against the potential advantages.

Priority 2 – Reduce Homelessness

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced a new requirement for Local Authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy focused on the prevention of homelessness in their districts, and the provision of appropriate accommodation and support for households accepted as homeless under the Homelessness legislation.

This has given North Wiltshire District Council the opportunity to work with partners in taking a more strategic approach to address and prevent homelessness in the District.

Option 1 - Prevention

The number of Housing Association properties in North Wiltshire is approximately 6700. However, in any one year the average number of these properties available to let is 450, of which approximately 140 are let to households accepted as homeless. However, as the District Council have accepted 251 households as statutorily homeless over the past year, it is essential to explore other housing options for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The number of homeless presentations is still rising; there has been an increase of 19% in presentations during 2004/2005 compared to the same period in 2003/04. However, the number of households accepted as statutorily homeless has decreased by 20% in the same 12 months. This illustrates the increased emphasis on homeless prevention being undertaken by the homelessness team.

The key to preventing homelessness is to explore housing options at an early stage, whether this is looking at solutions for securing someone's present accommodation or looking at alternatives for moving on.

Some of the available options are:

- Mediation with family or friends to stay in current accommodation
- Negotiation with landlords and/or Housing Benefits to prevent the termination of a tenancy
- Provision of a Rent Deposit to obtain accommodation in the Private Rented Sector
- Introduction of a Host Family Scheme to prevent young vulnerable people being placed in inappropriate Bed & Breakfast accommodation
- Joint home visits to tenants in Housing Association properties who are facing eviction for arrears or anti social behaviour

Option 2 - Eliminate use of B&B

Our use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation, particularly for families, has reduced radically. In 2003/2004 the average length of time families spent in B&B was 9 weeks, however for this year the ODPM target of no families in B&B for longer than 6 weeks has been met and exceeded. In many cases the use of B&B is avoided altogether, but where this is unavoidable, the average length of time a family spends in B&B is now 3 weeks.

This has been brought about by both an increase in prevention work and the successful launch of the Housing Association Leasing Scheme, which now enables the Homelessness Team to offer a range of temporary accommodation to homeless families in the District.

North Wiltshire District Council launched this scheme, in partnership with Westlea Housing Association and Sarsen Housing Association, in early 2004 and we now have 36 appropriately sized, self-contained properties for use as temporary accommodation throughout the District. This initiative not only ensures that homeless households have a better quality of life while waiting for permanent housing, but also makes considerable savings on Bed & Breakfast and Housing Benefit expenditure. The District Council will continue to monitor the use of temporary accommodation to keep the length of stay in Bed & Breakfast to an absolute minimum.

The Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA), involves working with Supporting People to increase supported housing in the District by remodelling current services and accommodation to ensure that the number of young people housed in unsuitable accommodation is significantly reduced by 2008. In addition the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for young people will be eliminated.

Through the Supporting People review of homelessness services in Wiltshire a need has been identified in North Wiltshire for more supported temporary accommodation for single homeless people. The provision of such new temporary accommodation should further reduce the need to use Bed and Breakfast establishments.

Option 3 - Improve services to homeless people

The Housing Team regularly consult homeless households on the quality of service provided to them and the level of satisfaction recorded is consistently high. We will continue to consult our service users and identify ways to improve our services.

The contract for our Housing Advice service comes to an end in March 2006 and we are taking this opportunity to review the service in line with the principles of Best Value. Consultation will take place with other local authorities, stakeholders and service users and examples of good practice gathered from local authorities identified as high performing in housing services. The information gathered will then be used to propose future options for the provision of an effective and customer focussed homelessness and housing advice service.

Westlea Housing Association now provide a floating support service for people regardless of their tenure. We have made use of this service to provide support for people in temporary accommodation

Option 4 - Improve inter agency working

In order to provide a consistent service for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, it is important to work with partners to improve interagency working, particularly at local level.

The 4 District Councils and Wiltshire County Council have agreed a joint protocol for young people at risk. This ensures that homeless or potentially homeless young people will have a consistent service regardless of the agency they first approach.

The Housing Team is also keen to set up a Wiltshire wide homelessness forum to share good practice and innovation. This has been included in our Action Plan.

Option 5 - Improve monitoring systems

We are working with the suppliers of our computerised homelessness system to improve monitoring. At the moment, much of the information is collected manually and it has been

difficult to monitor trends such as repeat homelessness. An improved monitoring system will enable us to target our resources more effectively.

Priority 3 – Improve Private Sector Housing

Option 1 - Care & Repair (Home improvement Agency)

There has been a history of working with and supporting Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) in the district dating back to 1997, when Anchor Staying Put first began providing a HIA service.

Following Government guidance which was aimed at having one HIA covering the whole of a county, Wiltshire's home improvement services were re-organised in April 2004. This reorganisation introduced an economy of scale which ensured that the services of a home improvement agency were available to all residents within Wiltshire.

At present Ridgeway Care & Repair is responsible for the provision of services in Swindon, Kennet, West Wiltshire and North Wiltshire Districts while Anchor Staying Put covers the south of the County.

In the summer of 2004, Anchor Staying Put and Ridgeway Care & Repair established a unique partnership to ensure a consistent service across the county. Council officers meet with the Home Improvement Agencies on a monthly basis to review case progress, explore new ideas and discuss any complaints or difficulties that may occur. The aim is to ensure both the Council and HIA services compliment rather than duplicate each other and that households will see a noticeable decrease in poor housing and a corresponding increase in health within the district.

The HIA is committed to supporting people in their own homes and has achieved real success in areas such as:

- ❑ Home Safety checks
- ❑ Benefit checks (to ensure all households are receiving their full benefit entitlements)
- ❑ Accessing private sector finance to fund repairs and adaptations where maximum council grant does not cover the full costs.
- ❑ Making referrals to the Bobby Van for home security.
- ❑ Making referrals to Warm Front – for installation of heating and insulation measures.
- ❑ Assisting vulnerable clients through the grant process thereby freeing up council officers to process and approve applications in addition to progressing other private sector issues.
- ❑ Promoting energy efficiency amongst its client group.

Added to this the HIA operates a very successful handy person scheme where vulnerable private sector households can get small but essential repairs completed for a small charge.

Option 2 - Energy efficiency

The council takes its role in terms of energy efficiency and Heca 1995 seriously and realises that improvements in this area are both vital to the future of our environment and the health and wellbeing of some of its most vulnerable households. Working in partnership with Wiltshire Energy Efficiency service and the Wiltshire Wide Heca Group, the Council provides advice and assistance to further this aim.

North Wiltshire District council is forming an Energy Group to ensure that in all areas of the Council's work the national aim of reducing climate change and promoting energy efficiency is addressed.

During the review of the Housing Renewal Strategy, officers will be looking at whether this area of work has sufficient resource both in terms of finance and staff.

The council continues to use other resources such as the website and its news letter "Improving North Wiltshire" to promote energy efficiency within the district. The council also monitors progress within the social rented sector.

Option 3 - Making Best Use of Available Resources

Under the regulatory reform order 2003, Councils are encouraged to look for alternatives to compliment existing assistance provided for Housing Renewal within their Districts.

In North Wiltshire, many older owner-occupiers lack the finance to fund necessary home improvements but have considerable equity in their properties as evidenced by the District Wide Housing Needs Survey. However, the Council is aware that the provision of grants for housing renewal is not sustainable in the long term. The Private Sector Housing team is therefore working in partnership with neighbouring authorities to explore equity release and national loan schemes

The Council will continue to explore these options and consult with members and the public about funding alternatives for the future through its Housing Renewal Policy which is being reviewed later in the year.

Option 4 - Implementing the Housing Act 2004

In the past, the Council has tended to be more reactive than pro-active in the area of licensing homes in multiple occupation and enforcing fitness standards due to limited resources in terms of staff and finance. In order to ensure that a more pro-active approach could be taken in terms of enforcement, the Council transferred this function to the Environmental Services team in February 2005.

Grants, which are means tested, continue to be provided for properties found to be unfit in order to bring them back to a habitable standard.

Despite initial results from the Stock Condition survey showing a low level of unfitness (approximately 2% within the district) the Council intends to use its powers of enforcement to improve the condition of properties within its District.

The Housing Act 2004 has introduced a new fitness standard called the Health and Safety Rating System. This represents a shift away from inspecting the condition of the property to one of assessing the dangers/risks within the property for a particular client. Both Housing and Environmental Services are working hard to ensure that staff are properly trained in order to be

able to fully implement the new legislation and that the proper procedures and policies will be in place in the time specified by the government.

The 2004 Act also introduced the issue of HMO (Houses in Multiple Occupation) licensing.

Unlike some of its neighbours such as Swindon & Bath, North Wiltshire DC has a small number of properties that can be classed as HMOs under the new legislation. However, the Council is aware that the monitoring of HMOs within the District is of prime importance to ensure that the accommodation is of a fit standard and is managed in a proper manner for the benefit of the people who live there.

The Council will continue to work with the other Wiltshire authorities to ensure best practice in this area and will use its powers of enforcement where necessary.

Option 5 - Making Best Use of Existing Stock

The Council is committed to bringing empty homes back into use. With over 1300 households on the Housing Needs Register, even one long term empty property represents a considerable waste of resource. In the past the Council has relied on the provision of grant assistance together with the Rent Deposit Scheme and the Private Sector Leasing Scheme to achieve its target. However, in the future it intends to more proactive in:

- providing advice to owners of empty properties.
- using legislation such as Empty Dwelling Management Orders (once the guidance and advice has been provided by government)
- looking at more creative ways to help owners dispose of empty properties such as selling to a Housing Association, or a first time buyer, particularly in a situation where the present owner cannot afford to fund necessary repairs.

The Council is currently reviewing the Empty Homes Strategy for North Wiltshire and aims to have this completed by March 2006.

Performance Monitoring

This chapter examines our performance against targets set in our previous Housing Strategy 2002 – 2005 and compares our performance with that of other Local Authorities and national averages.

Benchmarking against other local authorities

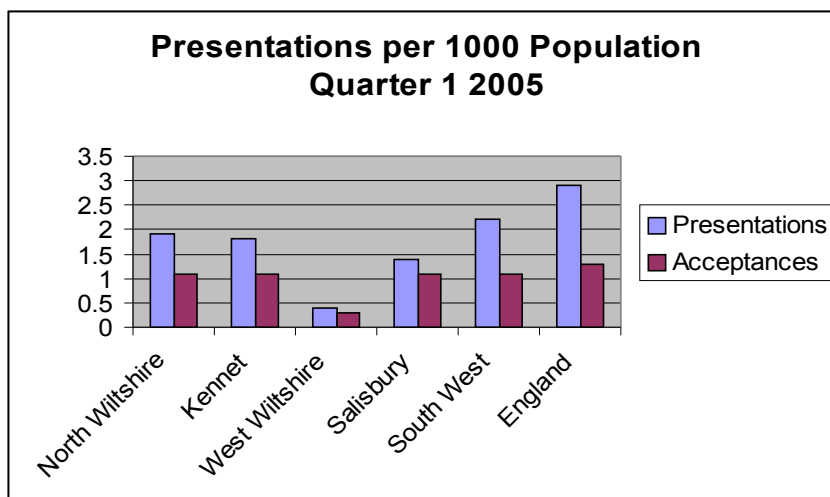
The table below shows how the Council has performed in 2004/05 against the Best Value Performance Indicators for housing compared with the national average

Best Value Performance Indicator	NWDC Performance	District Council top quartile targets 2003/2004
BVPI 62 – The proportion of unfit private sector dwellings made fit or demolished as a result of direct action by the Council	2.5%	3.75%
BVPI 64 – The number of private sector vacant dwellings that are returned into occupation or demolished as a direct result of action by the Council	8	No data
BVPI 183a – Average length of stay in B&B accommodation of households which include dependent children or a pregnant woman and which are unintentionally homeless (Wks)	4	1.18
BVPI 183b – Average length of stay in hostel accommodation of households which include dependent children or a pregnant woman and which are unintentionally homeless (Wks)	23	0.0
BVPI 176 – Number of domestic violence refuge places per 10,000 population which are provided or supported by the Authority	0.78	0.64
BVPI 202 – Number of people sleeping rough on a single night within the area of the Local Authority	6	New PI
BVPI 203 – Percentage change in the average number of families which include dependent children or a pregnant woman placed in temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation compared with the average from the previous year	+28%	New PI

Homelessness

Our services to homeless people have changed focus since the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002 and we now take a more proactive approach to the prevention of homelessness, this has been successful in reducing the number of households accepted as homeless as can be seen in the graph in the chapter on Needs.

The graph below shows the proportion of homelessness acceptances per 1000 head of population compared to neighbouring authorities and regional and national averages.



Performance Against Targets in the Strategy

The following table shows how the Council performed against the targets set in our Housing Strategy 2002 – 2005.

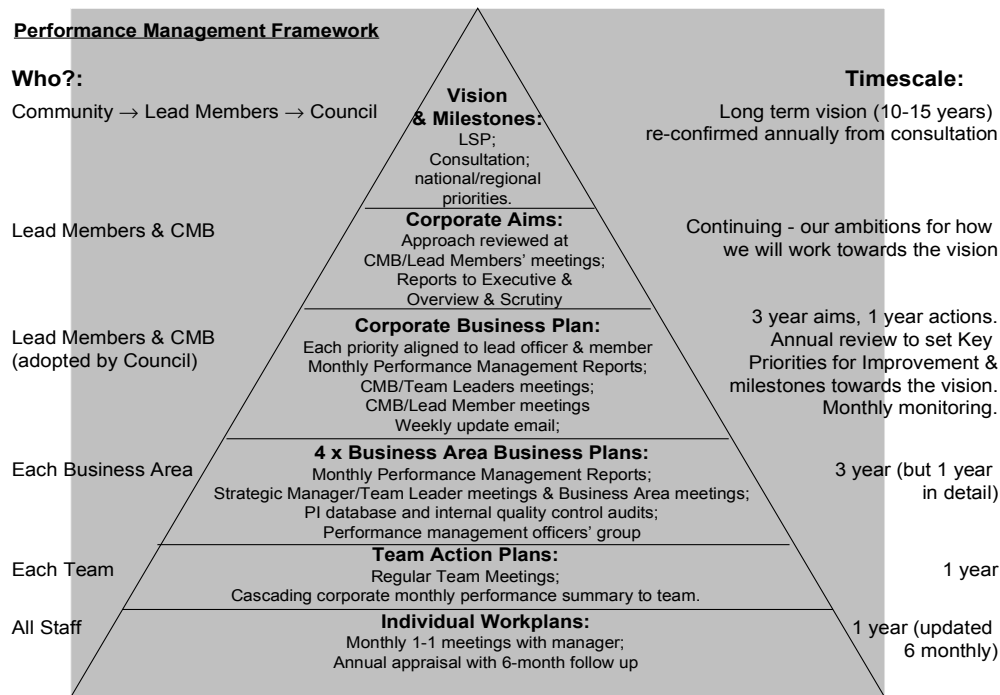
Target	Outcome	Comments
To have completed 270 Housing Association properties for rent by March 2005	Achieved 196 properties for rent	By March 2003, we were ahead of target with 100 completions in the first year. However, the need to examine options following the loss of LASHG slowed the development process and meant no capital resources were committed by the district in 2003/04
To ensure that at least 30% of new residential development is affordable housing.	Ongoing target	This was introduced by adoption of new Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance in May 2004.

To ensure that on 100% of developments above 25 units or 1 hectare, affordable housing is provided	Ongoing target	Affordable housing has been provided on all sites over 25 units or 1 hectare except for those where a commuted sum has been accepted.
To ensure that social/affordable housing is developed in clusters of no more than 15 units	Ongoing target	
To bring back into use 15 empty homes by March 2005 (BVPI 64)	Achieved	23 empty homes have been brought back into use between April 2002 and March 2005
To build 25 Affordable Home Ownership properties by March 2005	Achieved	49 new affordable home ownership properties were enabled in the district.
To commission and act on the recommendations of the House Condition Survey	Survey work completed. Awaiting analysis and report.	Completion of the survey report was delayed due to issues with the contractor. It is now anticipated that the report will be completed by December 2005.
To ensure that Disabled Facilities Grants are accessible to those most in need	Achieved	Use means testing to ensure those most in need are targeted. Also working in partnership to provide advice and assistance to the most vulnerable members of the community.
To complete review of Community Alarm System	Achieved	Community Alarm System contract awarded to Eldercare
To develop and open the Teenage Parents Scheme	Achieved	Scheme opened in 2004
To promote Fuel Poverty strategy and complete target number of energy updated homes	Partly Achieved	Improved overall energy efficiency of residential properties in the district by 17.51% by March 2004 from the baseline date of April 1996. On target to achieve HECA target of 30% improvement by 2010.
To work with Wiltshire partners implementing the Supporting People programme	Ongoing	Three new supported housing schemes completed in the district for young parents, women fleeing domestic violence and young

		people at risk. The Council is also contributing to reviews of homelessness, older persons and floating support services.
Produce the Homelessness Strategy by July 2003	Achieved	
To launch the Common Housing Register by August		This has been superseded by sub-regional working through the M4 Corridor group to look at introducing Choice Based Lettings across the sub-region and the prospect for more flexible allocations policies to allow for cross-authority movement.
To carry out satisfaction surveys for Homelessness & Housing Advice Services	Ongoing	The surveys have recorded high levels of satisfaction
Review Housing Advice contract by December 2003	Achieved	3 year contract with CAB renewed in December 2003
To Launch Choice Based Lettings Scheme	Achieved	In partnership with Westlea Housing Association
To work with Registered Social Landlords to ensure that all social housing meets the Decent Homes Standard by 2010	Ongoing	The Council is working in partnership with RSLs to ensure all social housing stock meets decent homes standards by 2010.

Performance Management

There is a performance management framework in place across the Council represented in the following diagram.



This diagram shows how the Vision links to the Corporate Aims and the Corporate Plan. The performance management framework ensures that the vision, aims and priorities are linked to the Council's Business Area, team and individual workplans throughout the organisation. Each individual is then able to see how their workplan fits into their team plan, their Business Area plan and the Corporate plan.

Progress against targets in individual workplans is monitored regularly at monthly 1:1s, annual appraisals and 6-monthly appraisal reviews. Information from these feeds into the monitoring of team plans which, in turn, feeds into the monthly performance reports for each Business area completed by team leaders. Each Business Area performance report is then summarised into a performance report for the whole organisation and this is reported monthly to Corporate Management Board, Lead Members and also back to the staff via team meetings. Progress on the Corporate Plan targets is also reported quarterly to Executive and Overview & Scrutiny committees.

This mechanism ensures that where there is slippage in meeting targets or other areas of concern or risk, these are identified at an early stage, investigated and action taken to redress any concerns. This can be through application of additional resources where necessary, or reorganising workloads to ensure the high priority tasks are completed.

Included within the performance management framework is an assessment of the Council's performance against national and local best value performance indicators. This enables the Council to compare its performance to other local authorities across the country and to endeavour to ensure continuous improvement through the Best Value Performance Plan.

In addition, the Council belongs to the Daventry benchmarking group, a group of similar local authorities. Using information from this group housing and other services are periodically benchmarked against other local authorities. Peer reviews have been carried out in homelessness and housing enabling and development services. The housing team is currently reviewing the housing advice service using the principles of best value – compare, challenge, compete and cost and will use information from the benchmarking group to

contribute to the review. This is to ensure the service provided to customers is efficient, effective, good value for money and meets customers' needs.