

2007 - 2012

Housing Matters

A Local Housing Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf



STRONG HERITAGE | STRONG FUTURE
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
TREFTADAETH GADARN | DYFODOL SICR

Foreword

As leader of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and Executive Member for Housing, I am delighted to introduce our new Local Housing Strategy. For perhaps the first time, the Strategy not only reflects national, regional and local housing themes and priorities but also draws from, and contributes to the overall corporate vision of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

We have named our Strategy 'Housing Matters'. This may seem an obvious point, however the impact of housing strategies on the success of other aims and objectives cannot be over emphasised. Equally the impact of other strategies on our vision and delivery will be crucial.

I have stressed the corporate nature of our new Strategy. This goes beyond the Borough Council and takes in views and expertise from all sectors of the Community, including the private sector and local people. This has been achieved through our Local Housing Partnership, which has directed the development of the strategy over the last months and which will continue to both monitor and develop our strategic aims over the years to come.

This is an exciting time for housing in Rhondda Cynon Taf with the transfer of the housing stock to RCT Homes and the massive investment and regeneration opportunities that this brings. We have acted to ensure that our retained strategic functions receive the profile they require to drive housing strategy forward. Our Housing Strategy Team has been working hard to gain evidence of need, for example through the recent Local Housing Market Assessment, and in organising, leading and servicing the Local Housing Partnership and its sub-groups. This new profile will we believe ensure that the ongoing development of strategy is of the highest quality.

While our strategic aims are wide ranging, there are overriding issues facing us, and others, which I feel I should highlight. The need for affordable housing is a growing demand on us as is the need to ensure that our homeless people are housed appropriately and helped to reach independence. Our commitment to meet the increasing needs of specific groups in our community remains central to our strategy as our recent work on the needs of the Gypsies and Travellers shows.

I am confident that on reading our new Local Housing Strategy you will find a clear view of the future of housing in the Borough and of Housing's central importance to achieving our overall aims in working for all the people of our community.



Russell Roberts
Leader Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

Housing Matters

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**PART 1
OUR LOCAL HOUSING
STRATEGY**

Our Vision for Rhondda Cynon Taf

'To enable a local housing market that responds effectively to the housing needs and aspirations of all sections of our society while promoting health and well-being, without compromising the needs of future generations.'

Our Strategic Aims

Our strategic aims have been chosen to ensure that they address and contribute towards meeting national housing priorities and local Community Plan objectives.

National housing priorities as identified in *'Better Homes for People in Wales'*, centre around the four themes of Affordability, Homelessness, meeting Welsh Housing Quality Standard and Supporting vulnerable people. Our local strategic aims reflect this.

Strategic Aim 1: 'To understand and influence the Local Housing Market to enable an adequate supply of housing that meets the needs of all groups within our community'

Strategic Aim 2: 'To encourage a Private Housing Sector that provides a quality living environment which promotes health and well being'

Strategic Aim 3: 'To enable good quality social rented accommodation that meets the needs of our communities, promotes health and well being with a customer focused housing management service creating balanced, socially inclusive, sustainable communities'

Strategic Aim 4: 'To encourage housing-led regeneration which promotes sustainable development and maximises environmental benefits'

Strategic Aim 5: 'To ensure that all groups have fair and equal access to housing and information'

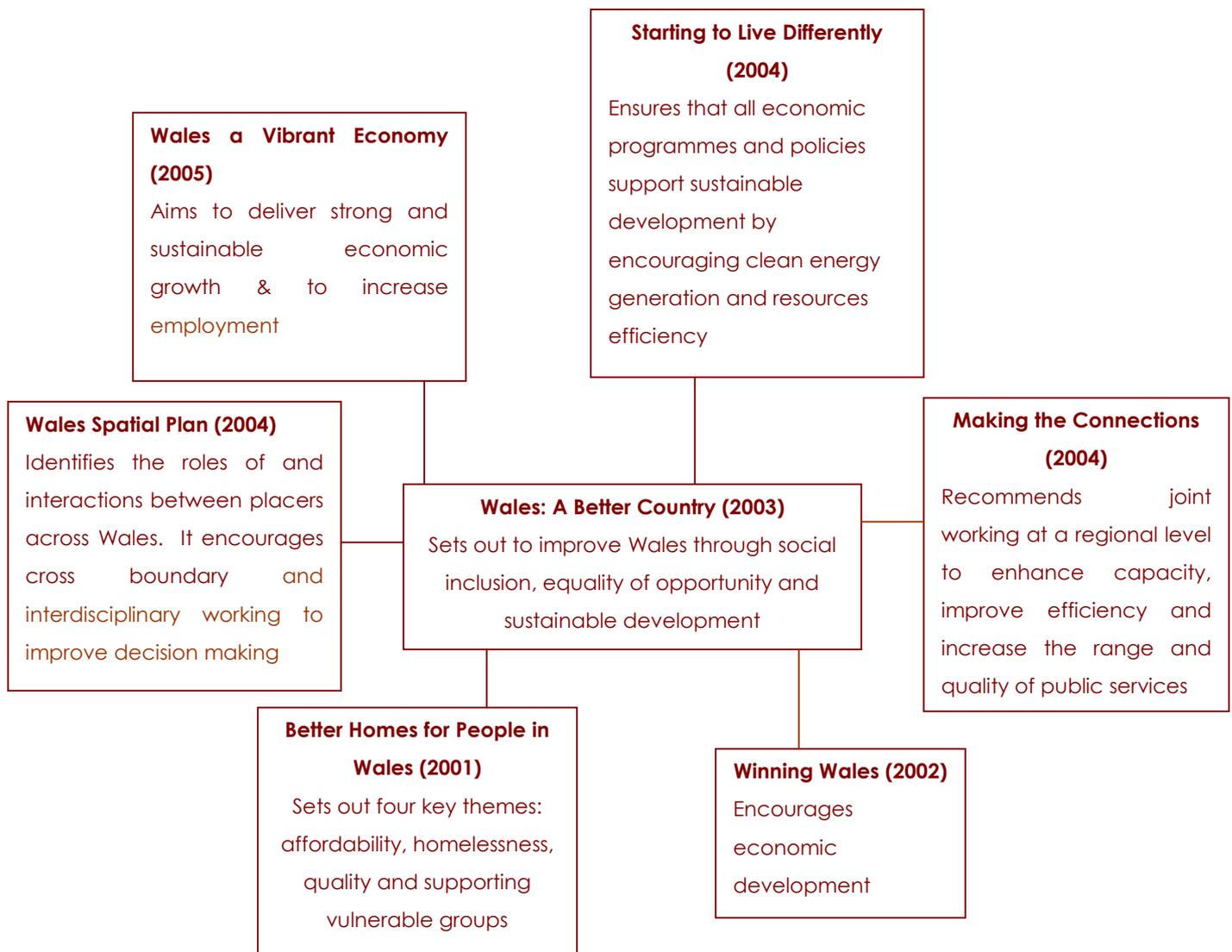
Strategic Aim 6: 'To promote the homelessness prevention agenda whilst also ensuring appropriate support and sustainable housing options are available for vulnerable homeless people'

Our Local Housing Strategy is structured to reflect these identified Strategic Aims. For each Strategic Aim, a number of Strategic Objectives have been identified followed by an outline of how we will meet these objectives in the future. This will inform the Housing Operational Plan.

Our Strategic Influences

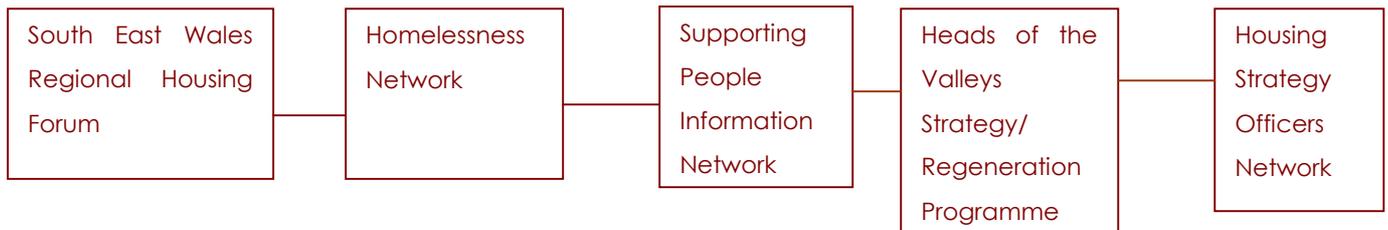
National Context

The key themes and priorities of Better Homes for People in Wales (2001) are reflected throughout our Local Housing Strategy and we will continue to work towards national strategic objectives in line with local needs and priorities. Other national priorities recommend joint working at a regional level to improve cross boundary working for greater efficiencies of the range and quality of public services.



Regional Context

We are committed to working regionally and appreciate the importance of regional working to assess our local housing markets to provide a robust evidence base for all our decision-making. We have also improved regional working arrangements in line with national priorities. Examples of joint working include;



Local Context

The Local Housing Strategy is key to delivery of many of the key themes of our Community Plan and from 2008, in line with Plan Rationalisation, it will be consumed as part of the Community Plan. However, the Local Housing Partnership will still remain a key strategic partnership of the local authority to monitor and deliver all key housing strategic priorities.



Our Strategic Housing Function

A robust strategic housing role is the key housing role in the local authority and is an essential precondition to an effective Local Housing Strategy and effective local services.

To ensure that our housing strategy team is 'fit for purpose' we have undertaken training at both a national and regional level. We have reviewed the structure of our team to ensure that we have the necessary skills and capacity to deliver. We now have a dedicated Energy Efficiency officer and an Affordable Housing officer within the team. After the recent decision to transfer our housing stock to RCT Homes, the retained Strategic Housing Function has been repositioned within the Public Health and Protection Division. This will assist us in making links with the private sector and meeting our strategic objectives in this area.

We are involved in partnership working at both a local, regional and national level. We regularly attend the National Strategic Housing Network where we share best practice and contribute to the national housing agenda. Regionally, we are a key partner on the South East Wales Regional Housing Forum, having acted as chair for 2006/7 and also contribute actively to the Regional Homelessness Forum. Membership of these forums have enabled us to maximise available resources and to recognise the importance of cross boundary housing issues, thereby contributing to the framework of collaboration encouraged by the Wales Spatial Plan.

Locally, we have recently launched our Local Housing Partnership which aims to harness the skills and knowledge of all sectors in Rhondda Cynon Taf to enable us to establish relevant strategic housing objectives and to deliver them effectively. We also contribute to other local partnerships including Fframwaith, the Health, Social Care and

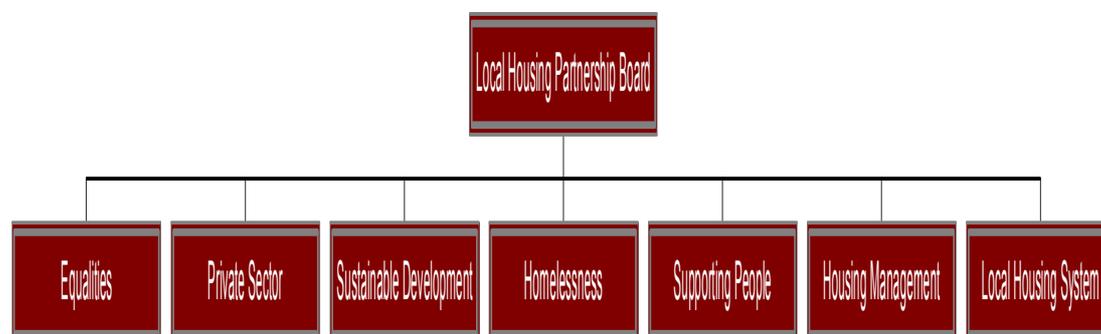
Well Being partnership, the Community Safety Partnership, Information and Research Partnerships, the Multi Agency Forum Against Racial Harassment (MAFARH), Domestic Abuse Forum, South Wales HECA Forum, Sustainable Development Partnership and many other local Regeneration and Community First partnerships throughout the Borough.

Our Local Housing Strategy

The Development of our Local Housing Strategy

Local Housing Partnership

To ensure a coordinated approach to the development of our Local Housing Strategy we launched our Local Housing Partnership in March 2007. The Local Housing Partnership consists of key stakeholders from public, private, community and voluntary sectors in Rhondda Cynon Taff and is structured thematically replicating the main themes that are addressed in our Strategy. Each working group has the responsibility to develop the key strategic objectives and actions for their theme which have then been translated in to the Strategy. The Local Housing Partnership Board has the responsibility for monitoring the development of the strategy and agreeing its overall vision.



Each working group has met on various occasions over the last few months to ensure that our Local Housing Strategy is representative of local issues and that key priorities are addressed.

Consultation on the Local Housing Strategy

We are committed to ensuring that our Strategy is fully representative of the needs and aspirations of all our communities and ensured that it was developed in partnership. Our Local Housing Partnership Launch was attended by over 60 key stakeholders and provided an opportunity for attendees to discuss the proposed structure and responsibilities and also provided an outline for the development of the strategy. The Strategy itself was developed through our themed sub-groups, which also incorporated existing partnerships and forums. During the formal consultation period we extensively consulted with community groups and hard to reach groups and as such we feel that we have produced a robust Strategy, reflective of national and regional priorities but based on our locally agreed priorities. Full details of the consultation process and framework can be found in Appendix 2.

Monitoring of the Local Housing Strategy

The Local Housing Strategy will be monitored and updated annually by the Local Housing Partnership and its subgroups to ensure it remains relevant over the course of its life. The Operational Plan will be monitored and updated on a quarterly basis, also by the Local Housing Partnership. Outcomes of this monitoring and review process will form an updated section in each year's annual update of the Local Housing Strategy to ensure that it continues to remain a strategically relevant and dynamic document in the years to come.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

We do not feel that it is necessary to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment for this Strategy. The Local Development Plan influences the use of land in the Borough and therefore has a

direct impact on the environment in a way that the Local Housing Strategy as a sub strategy of the Local Development Plan does not.

The potential environmental impact of the Local Development Plan is assessed at each stage of the progress of the plan via a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal.

Our Borough

Rhondda Cynon Taf is home to 231,946 people and the second largest local authority in Wales, occupying 44,000 hectares of the South Wales Valleys, stretching from the Brecon Beacons in the North, to the outskirts of Cardiff in the South.

It is a diverse area, comprising of a mixture of urban, semi-urban and rural communities and encompasses a number of principal towns, such as Pontypridd in the South and Aberdare in the North. The borough also offers outstanding natural environments, such as rolling farmland and woods and former coalfields, which are rich in biodiversity.

A world-famous coal mining industry once dominated Rhondda Cynon Taf, however the effects of industry restructuring have been severe. 17 of the top 75 most deprived wards in Wales are found here. The poor condition of some of the housing in these areas coupled with a high level of empty properties has had an adverse affect on the supply of good quality affordable housing.

There are however some more affluent communities in the Borough, particularly in the South. House prices in this area are relatively high and affordability is increasingly an issue. The Welsh Assembly Government has identified this locale as a major growth area for the provision of housing, particularly as it is served by excellent motorway links to the M4.

In line with the rest of the UK, the most popular tenure in Rhondda Cynon Taf is owner occupation (74.86%), followed by social housing at 14.71% and Private rentals at 6.49% of all tenures. The smallest tenure group is owner occupied shared ownership at 0.31%, with other households (renting) making up the remaining 3.63%.

There is an ageing population in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Census figures show that this trend is increasing. Our housing market assessment (September 2006) projects a particular need for 1 bedroom properties, which reflects the growth of single person households (27.7%). Despite our increasing need for more homes, the borough currently has just under 4000 empty properties.

Rhondda Cynon Taf is home to people from many cultural backgrounds, however, the number of Minority Ethnic (ME) households here is low. There are just 630 (0.7%) ME households within the Borough, compared with 94,086 (98.6%) White British/Irish households and 685 (0.7%) White Other households. While our ME and White Other population is distributed throughout the Rhondda Cynon Taf, our Local Housing Market Assessment shows that these two household groups are more heavily concentrated in the South of the Borough.

PART 2
OUR STRATEGIC AIMS

Strategic Aim 1

'To understand and influence the Local Housing Market to enable an adequate supply of housing that meets the needs of all groups within our community'

'Better Homes for People in Wales' says... 'We are committed to sustainable homeownership – where householders can meet the long-term cost of buying and maintaining a home. We support the less well off and those who live in areas where prices are relatively high to become owners through low cost home ownership schemes.'

Our Strategic Objectives

1. To ensure we have a good understanding of the local housing market and an accurate and robust evidence base for decision making
2. To increase the supply of affordable housing in the county borough in accordance with housing need to include social rented and intermediate housing.
3. To ensure that the local housing market adequately meets the needs of all groups and sectors within the community.

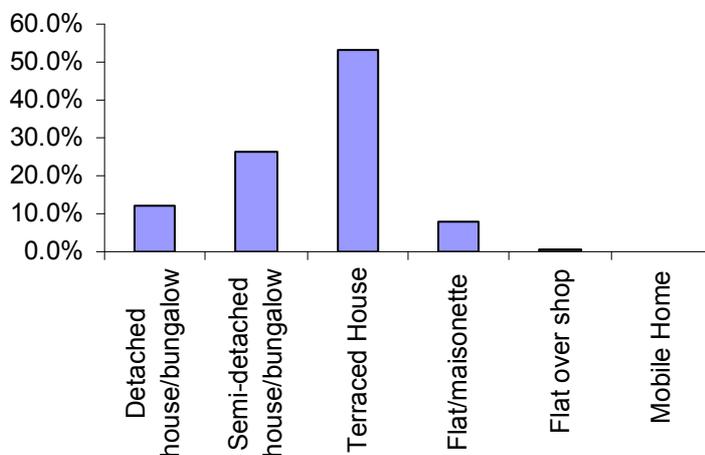
Our Local Housing Market

What did our Local Housing Market Assessment tell us?

We asked Fordham Research to carry out a Local Housing Market Assessment in line with the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Local Housing Market Assessment Guide' (March 2006). The assessment was designed to assess the future requirements for both affordable and market housing in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It used a number of sources of primary and secondary data which included a survey covering a wide range of issues such as current housing circumstances, past moves, future housing intentions, and income levels. A review of secondary evidence including Land Registry data, the Census 2001 and national statistics was also undertaken.

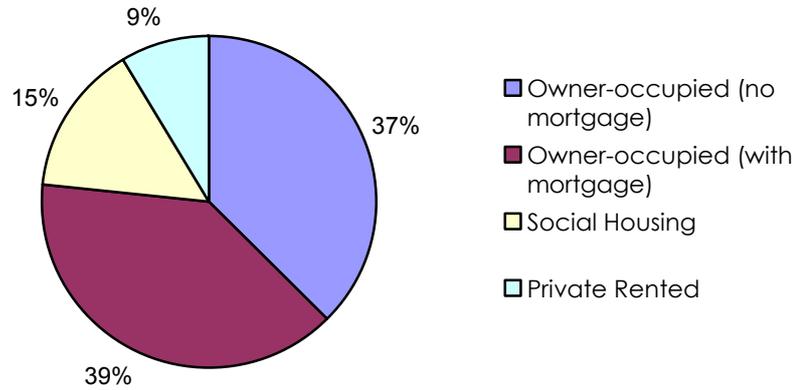
Profile of Current Housing in Rhondda Cynon Taf

Type of Housing



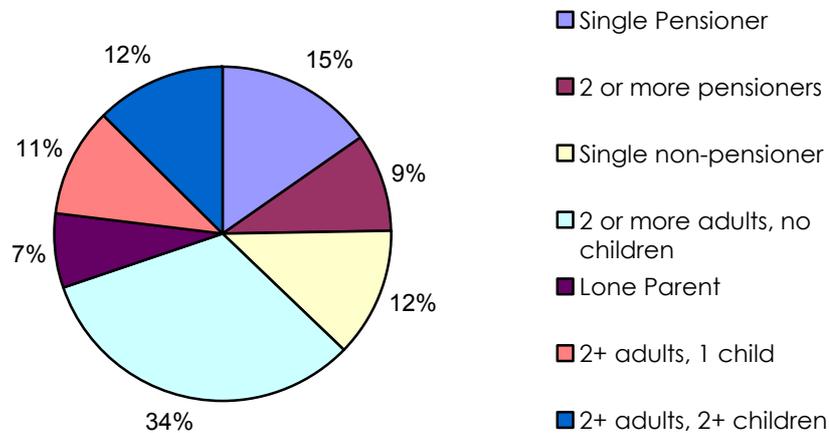
- As expected for a Valleys Local Authority over a half of our households live in terraced housing
- A small number of households live in flats or maisonettes

Tenure



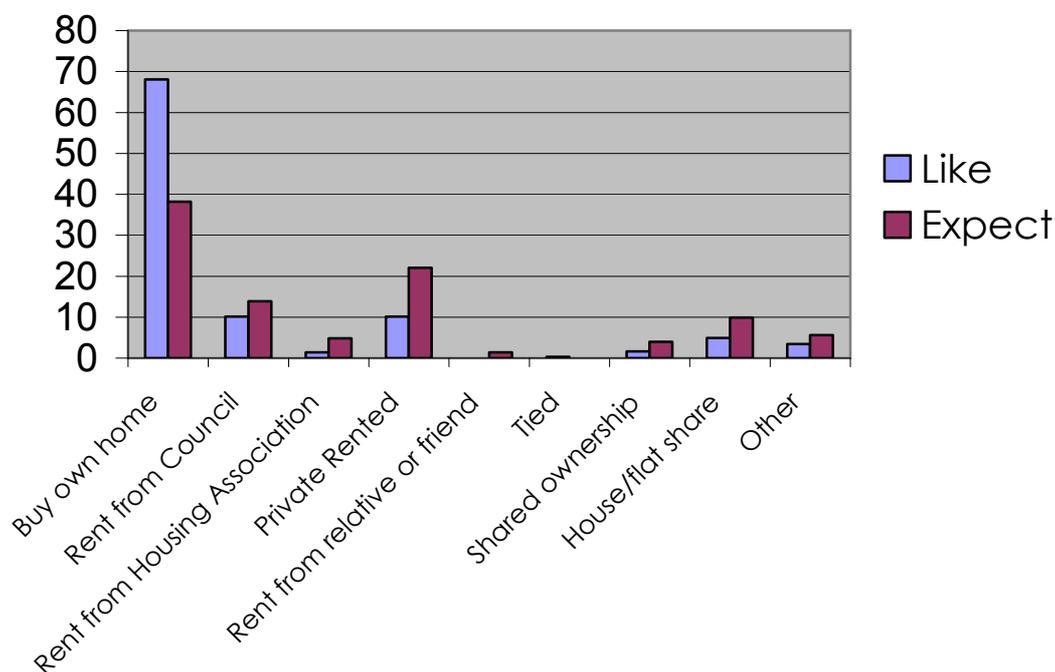
- In line with national trends, the largest tenure in RCT is owner-occupation.
- The second largest tenure is social rented.
- The smallest tenure in RCT is the private rented sector.

Household Type



- In line with national trends the most common household type is households containing 2 or more adults with no children
- There is a large percentage of single person households reflecting national demographic trends

Housing Aspirations



- The survey showed that most people in RCT aspire to be home owners
- However, of those who aspire to own a home, only half expect to do so.

Cost of Housing

There are differences in housing costs between different tenures in RCT. As expected, the highest costs are in the owner-occupied (with mortgage) sector and the lowest in the social rented sector. Differences were more marked when housing benefit was removed.

Using Land Registry data the survey also found that price rises in Rhondda Cynon Taf have been above the national equivalents over the past five years. Between 2001 and 2005, average property prices in England and Wales rose by around 82%. For Wales, the increase was 112%, whilst for Rhondda Cynon Taf the figure was 128%.

A survey of local estate and lettings agents identified estimates of the minimum costs of housing to both buy and rent in the County Borough.

The analysis of the minimum and average property prices showed that there were differences within the borough, most distinctly between North and South. The estate agent information indicated that the County Borough contains three distinct sub-markets, which largely correspond with the boundaries of the former boroughs of Rhondda, Cynon and Taf.

Household Income

The survey estimated that the average gross annual household income (including non-housing benefits) to be £20,021. There were wide variations by tenure with households living in the rented sector having particularly low income levels.

Housing Requirement In Rhondda Cynon Taf

The Local Development Plan (LDP)

The Council is required to prepare a LDP for the County Borough which when adopted will replace the existing three local plans and the Mid Glamorgan Structure Plan. The LDP will provide the strategy and policy framework for the commercial, residential, retail, leisure, minerals, waste and other development in the County Borough over a fifteen-year period, from 2006 to 2021. It will be used by the Council to guide and control development, providing a basis by which planning applications can be determined consistently and appropriately. An essential element of the LDP evidence base will be the identification of land suitable for future development. Land being promoted for future development will be included in the Candidate Sites Process. These sites will be assessed over the coming months, with the most suitable sites being taken forward into the Deposit Draft Local Development Plan.

Overall Housing Requirement

Population projections derived from work undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government indicate that the number of households in South East Wales will increase by 108,900 between 2003 to 2023. On the basis of these projections it is anticipated that during this 20-year period the number of new households in Rhondda Cynon Taf will increase by 17,627. In order to accommodate this growth 14,850 new dwellings will need to be constructed throughout the County Borough during the 15 year Local Development Plan Period. This is a high growth rate and will result in an increase of the house building rate from 660 to 990 per annum. The Local Housing Market Assessment indicated that there is a need for affordable housing in the County Borough and therefore some of the new housing provided through the Local Development Plan will be provided to meet some of this need. The next section of this strategy therefore defines and outlines the need for affordable housing and the possible options available for increasing the supply.

Assessing the Need for Affordable Housing

Affordable housing for the purpose of the Local Housing Strategy is defined as:

'Housing provided to those whose needs are not met by the open market. Affordable housing should meet the needs of eligible households, available at low enough cost for them to afford, determined by local incomes and local house prices.'

Affordable housing includes **social rented housing** owned by local authorities and housing associations and owner-occupation through so-called **intermediate housing** where prices or rents are above those of social rent but below market housing prices and rents. Intermediate housing for sale is usually referred to as Low Cost Home Ownership.

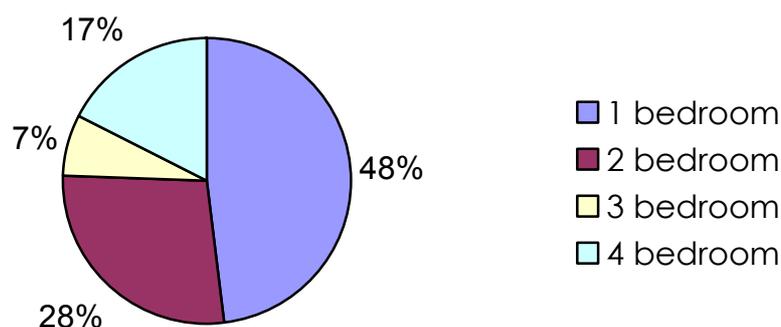
What did our Local Housing Market Assessment tell us?

We used the *Basic Needs Assessment Model* (BNAM) to estimate the need for affordable housing. The BNAM uses 18 stages of analysis which include three main analytical stages with a fourth stage producing the final requirement figure. The stages are:

- Backlog of existing need
- Newly arising need
- Supply of affordable units
- Overall affordable housing requirement

For the whole of Rhondda Cynon Taf, the Local Housing Market Assessment indicated that there is a shortfall of affordable housing of around 870 units per annum. The type and size of affordable housing required is outlined in the diagrams below.

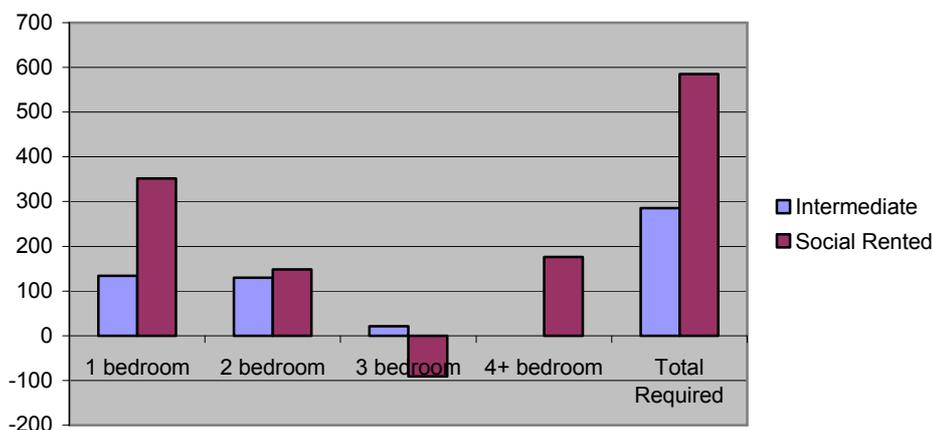
Size of Affordable Housing Required



The main shortage is for one and two bedroom homes, however, the shortage relative to supply is highest in the four-bedroom category.

Type of Affordable Housing Required

Overall, for the county borough as a whole, almost a third of the net requirement for affordable housing is for intermediate housing. The greatest need is for one and two bedroom accommodation.



What we have achieved so far

Homebuy

Through the Social Housing Grant programme we have facilitated 30 residents into homeownership using Homebuy loans since 2005 and have successfully bid for funding for a further 15 loans for 2007/08. By assisting people with a 30% equity loan, this scheme has enabled local people to purchase a home on the open market who may otherwise not have been able to afford to do so and has therefore contributed to meeting some of the need for intermediate housing.

In order to complement the limited funding available for Homebuy, we have entered into a partnership with Hafod Housing Association to self-fund Homebuy loans in Rhondda Cynon Taf. To date, this has provided an additional 28 loans, with a commitment for a further 12 in 2007/08. This option has contributed to meeting some of the need for intermediate housing.

Social Housing Grant (SHG)

SHG is a capital grant made available by the Assembly Government to Housing Association Development Consortiums (DEVCo and Integrate in Rhondda Cynon Taf) to provide new affordable housing for rent or low cost home ownership and also to provide much needed supported housing which is often difficult to deliver through any other mechanism. The Assembly Government pays SHG to housing associations for housing schemes that meet local needs and priorities as identified in this strategy.

For 2008/09 SHG programme Rhondda Cynon Taf had 11 affordable housing schemes approved which could deliver in total an additional 130 units of affordable housing accommodation over the next few years. However the ability of the development consortiums to deliver these units is dependent on a number of issues including the purchase of land at a reasonable price and securing planning permission. Rhondda Cynon Taf's cash allocation of SHG for 2008/09 is £2,852,000, a 20% reduction on 2007/08 and so the deliverability of these schemes is also dependent on the Consortiums ability to 'forward fund' schemes as the total cost of the schemes approved vastly exceeds the cash allocation for the authority.

The delivery of these schemes in partnership with local housing associations will contribute to the overall need for affordable housing in the borough.

Affordable Housing secured through Section 106 Planning Agreements

We have been negotiating affordable housing requirements on large new build residential sites through the use of Section 106 Planning Agreements for some time. This has been made possible by using National Planning Policy and TAN 2.

We have increased the supply of affordable housing through this mechanism and it has contributed to meeting some of the need for both intermediate and social rented housing in areas of housing need.

An example of affordable housing secured through section 106 is at Blackthorn Court, Llanharry. This is a Persimmon Homes development of 44 properties, in the south of the borough which provided 7 affordable homes to the Council for affordable housing, 15% of the total provision. The units included 4 x 2 bedroom homes and 3 x 3 bedroom homes. Each property was made available using discounted market sale where via a restriction on the title of the property the purchaser was able to acquire the house at a 30% discount. To ensure the perpetuity of the affordable housing unit, the purchaser, when they wish to sell the property is required to return to the Council who will then nominate another purchaser in need of financial assistance to purchase the property with the same percentage discount.

The two bedroom properties were taken up by first time buyers and the three bedroom properties have assisted local families to acquire more appropriately sized accommodation and ensure sustainable home ownership. All of the affordable housing units have been purchased by people who currently live and work in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

'Homestep' Low Cost Homeownership Scheme

We have established a low cost homeownership register called 'Homestep' which enables the administration and allocation of affordable housing for sale in Rhondda Cynon Taf either Homebuy or properties secured through section 106 agreements. Homestep ensures sustainable homeownership and offers clear advice on the house-buying process. The Homestep scheme utilises a local eligibility criteria and is targeted towards first time buyers. Within the scheme social rented tenants are given priority to purchase a home through the register, thereby freeing up social rented housing.

There are currently 170 applications accepted onto the *Homestep* register.

Analysis of Applicants on the Homestep Register

12.5% of applicants on the register are Housing Association Tenants (including RCT Homes) whilst 87.5% of applicants on the register have an RCT Connection. Of these, a large majority are living with family or are in privately rented accommodation.

9 of the 170 applicants on the Homestep register currently live outside Rhondda Cynon Taf, but all have a work connection to the borough. The average age of a Homestep applicant is 28 years and 9 months and the average annual family income of Homestep applicants is £22,364 including secondary earnings and tax credits.

Meeting our Strategic Objectives

In order '*To understand and influence the Local Housing Market to provide an adequate supply of housing that meets the needs of all groups within our community*' we need to consider what actions we will undertake to meet the strategic objectives we have identified.

Strategic Objective 1: To ensure that the local authority has a good understanding of the local housing market and has an accurate and robust evidence base for decision making

Local Housing Market Assessment

In the future we will undertake regular updates of the Local Housing Needs Assessment to enable constant monitoring of trends and to ensure that our evidence base is accurate and reflects local needs. This process will be aided by our recent purchase as part of the South East Wales Regional Housing forum, of 'Hometrack' a housing market analysis tool, but will also require the assistance of all research officers in the borough to ensure the collection of robust and reliable data.

Strategic Objective 2: To increase the supply of affordable housing in the County Borough in accordance with housing need to include social rented and intermediate housing.

As discussed earlier in this chapter our Local Housing Market Assessment has highlighted a considerable need for affordable housing in the County Borough as a significant proportion of our population is unable to meet their housing needs through the private housing market. Outlined below are the various tools and opportunities available to the Council to help meet this need.

Securing New Affordable Housing through the Planning System

The LDP can play an important role in assisting to meet some of the need for affordable housing. Over the coming months we will therefore be working closely with our colleagues in Development Planning to establish appropriate targets for securing affordable housing through the LDP process. The approach will be part of a robust and well evidenced Affordable Housing Policy and Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance.

However, we recognize that whilst the LDP will enable a supply of affordable housing, due to the high level of need this cannot all be provided through the planning system. We will therefore also need to expand opportunities to maximise the provision of both social rented and affordable housing for sale by promoting the reuse and rehabilitation of existing older housing stock in the County Borough, including empty properties, maximize our Social Housing Grant allocation and encourage housing associations to work in partnership with the local authority to identify innovative ways of increasing the supply of affordable housing. Our approach in these areas is outlined below.

Empty Properties

There is significant potential for increasing the supply of affordable housing in the borough by developing an Empty Property Action Plan that will enable existing empty properties to be brought back in to use for affordable housing. Their presence can have a direct impact on the regeneration of a locality, particularly where there are high concentrations and those present are in a poor condition and so utilising empty properties for this purpose will also improve health and well being in the County Borough. In 2004 we carried out research to quantify the extent of the problem of empty properties in the County Borough. This research concluded that there are just under 4000 empty properties in the borough. Further analysis of the research into the specific location of these empty properties enables us to compare the data against the Local Housing Market Assessment (2006). There is a correlation between the areas of the County Borough including the highest number of empty properties and the areas with the highest level of housing need indicating that there will be a benefit to bringing empty properties back in to use in the borough.

An Empty Property working group has been established to co-ordinate the Council's action in response to empty properties and includes representatives from Housing Strategy, Public Health and Protection and local housing associations.

The working group is currently researching best practice in other areas of England and Wales to identify funding solutions for the re-use of empty properties for affordable housing. The outcome of this research will influence our approach in Rhondda Cynon Taf and is likely to include the identification of funding from a number of areas, including the use of commuted sums through section 106 agreements in lieu of on site affordable housing provision, housing association's own resources and possibly from the local authority itself. The working group will also be carrying out a costing exercise to establish how much

funding will be needed to bring the empty properties back in to use for affordable housing.

Social Housing Grant

We will continue to work closely with our housing association partners to identify affordable housing schemes that can form bids to the Assembly Government for social housing grant on an annual basis. We will prioritise schemes that meet the strategic aims and objectives outlined in this strategy and that are proven to be deliverable and will meet identified housing need. We have established quarterly meetings with DEVCo and Integrate, the two development consortiums operating in RCT, to ensure a co-ordinating approach to social housing grant and effective monitoring of the local authority spend. This will assist us to identify potential barriers to delivery at an early stage and help us to enable effective and efficient spend of our social housing grant allocation.

Partnerships with Housing Associations

We will work with local housing associations to develop innovative ways of utilising the private sector to enable more affordable housing. This could include

- Delivering more non –grant funded low cost homeownership
- The purchase of new build properties directly from developers at a discount, but outside of any section 106 agreement. These properties could then be made available to local people as low cost home ownership.
- Leasing private rented accommodation to be used as social housing. This would have a dual benefit of increasing affordable housing and make use of existing empty properties in this sector.

Strategic Objective 3: To ensure that the Local Housing Market adequately meets the needs of all groups and sectors within the community.

Meeting the needs of our Community

Through our Local Housing Partnership we will ensure that we meet the needs of our whole community. We will undertake regular assessments of the accommodation needs of Older people, Gypsies and Travellers, ME groups and vulnerable people to ensure that their needs are adequately addressed by the Local Housing market. Where a housing need is established for a particular client group this need should be met through any suitable section 106 agreements or bids to the Assembly Government for Social Housing Grant for new accommodation or refurbishment of existing suitable accommodation.

Review of 'Homestep' Low Cost Homeownership Scheme

We need to undertake a review of the 'Homestep' Low Cost Homeownership scheme to reflect recent national guidance on 'Homebuy' and to ensure that it is assisting those most in need. This will include a review of policies and procedures and eligibility criteria.

Strategic Aim 2

'To encourage a Private Housing Sector that provides a quality living environment which promotes health and well being'

'Better Homes for People in Wales' says... 'We are committed to improving the overall quality of private rented stock and management, and stimulate increased investment in the private sector... We will ensure that all people in Wales have access to free high quality housing advice and promote access to specialist housing advice where this is needed.'

Our Strategic Objectives

1. To improve partnership working and communication with the private sector
2. To improve the condition of properties in the private sector across Rhondda Cynon Taf
3. To make the best use of existing private sector housing stock
4. To improve the quality of life and health and well being in areas with high concentrations of private rented accommodation

Our Private Housing Sector

The private sector in Rhondda Cynon Taf is dominated by homeownership, with only 9% of all households renting privately. Some private rented accommodation is in the form of Houses of Multiple Occupation and this type of accommodation is particularly common in areas such as Treforest, where the University of Glamorgan is situated.

Data from the Welsh House Condition Survey 1998 identifies a high level of unfitness in private rented properties throughout Wales (18.4%), in comparison to 7.6% in the owner-occupied sector and 8.2% in the social rented sector. Within Rhondda Cynon Taf the unfitness of these dwellings is mainly caused through disrepair and/or dampness.

What we have achieved so far

Improving Quality of Life in the Private Sector

Housing Renewal Policy (Private Sector)

The Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (HGCR ACT) sets out a framework against which local authorities should develop their investment into their private sector stock to reduce the level of unfit housing. Changes in the formula for grant allocation were brought in with the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance (England & Wales) 2002) and the emphasis changed to providing “local solutions for local problems”. We are adopting a more strategic approach towards investment in the private sector due to the demographic make up of the area. Within our area there are some 77,000 houses in private ownership, much of which are over 100 years old.

There are a significant number of residents who are on low incomes, elderly and vulnerable and living in poor conditions. In many of these cases intervention from the Council is needed to improve housing conditions via different forms of grant aid.

In recent years a larger proportion of the grant budget available to Private Sector Housing has been targeted toward the disabled, elderly and vulnerable. The Authority currently provides discretionary Renovation grants (£1.2m in 2007/08), discretionary Maintenance and Repair Assistance grants for the elderly on limited income (£2.5m in 2007/08), mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants and adaptations (£4.4m in 2007/08), as well as funding for other initiatives such as energy efficiency (£200k in 2007/08), community regeneration etc.

Area Renewal and Regeneration

The aim of a Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) is to address disrepair of private houses and social deprivation in an identified geographical boundary utilising domestic grants and environmental schemes to reverse the decline and raise local confidence and pride in the community. NRAs are based on Group Repair Schemes, which aim to remedy any exterior problems relating to the external envelope of properties in order to aesthetically improve and extend their lifespan. The grant also provides the opportunity for local community groups to implement Environmental Improvement Schemes within the boundary, such as improvements to local parks, community buildings and highways. Undertaking physical improvements to housing also has related health and well being benefits and contributes positively to community sustainability.

We have declared two Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Treherbert & Tynewydd in the Rhondda was declared in 2002 whilst Miskin & Penrhiwceiber in the Cynon Valley was declared in 2003.

To date we have spent £7.1 million in Specific Capital Grant and have been awarded a further £2 million for expenditure in 2007-08. The Private Sector Housing Unit has invested a further £2.5 million in both areas since their declaration via the provision of grants for disabled facilities, home repair assistance and renovation.

An additional £400,000 in private finance has been invested in the areas to date via applicants' contributions to Group Repair Schemes.

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and Works of Adaptation (WOA)

A key area of Private Sector Housing activity is delivering Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and minor works of adaptation to private sector owner occupiers.

This is a very high profile service area that contributes to our Health and Well Being agenda by helping vulnerable and disabled residents live independently, and safely in their own homes. We support this important area of activity with significant investment to meet the growing demand of an ageing population (£4.4 million in 2007/08).

DFG is a mandatory grant, where eligibility is determined in accordance with the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act and the HGCR Act. Referrals for this type of grant come from Community Care.

Innovative partnership working with suitably experienced contractors, via a contractual agreement with the Private Sector Housing Agency Service contributed to national top quartile position in 2005/06, with further improvements on the national Performance Indicator recorded in 2006/07.

Continuous improvement in the DFG service will be measured via the national Performance Indicator that records average DFG timescales from first contact with the Authority to provision of the adaptation.

The Works of Adaptation service also provides minor aids and adaptations (e.g. handrails, ramps, hoists etc) where the cost is less than £600. This service is referred by Community Care staff to provide a quick response to remove danger and provide support, allow hospital discharge etc. for disabled, elderly owner occupiers throughout the County Borough.

Budgetary Spend	04/05	05/06	06/07	Total
Renovations	£2,101,752.00	£2,205,703.00	£2,274,315.00	£ 6,581,770.00
HRA/MRA	£2,151,157.00	£2,265,783.00	£2,203,174.00	£ 6,620,114.00
DFG	£4,114,219.00	£4,258,841.00	£5,285,197.00	£13,658,257.00
Non Trads	£ 136,083.00	£ 144,874.00	£ 139,955.00	£ 420,912.00
Total	£8,503,211.00	£8,875,201.00	£9,902,641.00	£27,281,053.00

Number of Grants	04/05	05/06	06/07	Total
Renovations	64	94	82	240
HRA/MRA	745	792	589	2126
DFG	336	400	330	1066
Non Trads	11	10	6	27
Total	1156	1296	1007	3459

Equity Release and Loans

We are currently working in partnership with a number of other Authorities (South Wales Loans Consortium) to develop a mechanism to offer loans to clients who fulfil certain eligibility criteria.

The loans pilot scheme is intended to be available during the latter part of 2007/08.

Resources to Support Housing Renewal and DFGs

COMMUNITY HOUSING				
	3 Year Capital Programme 2007 - 2010			
Private Sector Housing	07/08	08/09	09/10	TOTAL
Disabled Facilities Grants/Adaptations (DFGs)	4,450	4,450	4,450	13,350
Home Repair Assistance (HRAs)	2,500	2,500	2,500	7,500
Renovation Grants Exceptional Circumstances	1,210	1,210	1,210	3,630
Grants Computer System	40	0	0	40
Carelink Equipment	50	50	50	150
Community Regeneration	108	108	108	324
Contingency	0	40	40	80
Energy Efficiency Programme	200	200	200	600
TOTAL	8,558	8,558	8,558	25,674

Care and Repair

The aims of the Care & Repair Agency are to support older and disabled people to repair, improve or adapt their home in order to enable them to remain independent. The service seeks to overcome health, care and physical problems arising from inadequate housing.

The Board of Management includes representatives from local Housing Associations, Cabinet members, the Local Health Board, client group representatives, council officers from Housing and Community Care and a local hospital.

As evidenced by Care and Repair Rhondda Cynon Taf's Strategic Business Plan 2007-2012, the agency assists the Local Authority and the Welsh Assembly Government in delivering strategic objectives by making contributions to a wide range of local and national strategies and plans.

Care and Repair works with a wide range of partners to ensure their service is as effective as possible in meeting the needs of our community. Partners include the Council, Local Housing Associations, the Local Health Board, local hospitals and other local and national voluntary agencies. The agency also takes part in campaigns such as 'Keep Well this Winter' and has strong partnerships with Communities First schemes.

Core funding provided to Care and Repair by Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC is £125,634 annually.

Rapid Response Adaptations Programme (RRAP)

This is a free rapid reactive repair and adaptation service operated by Care and Repair, joint funded by the Council and the Welsh Assembly Government. RRAP allows older and disabled people to live in a safe and secure home environment. Clients are eligible if they are in hospital or have recently been discharged or wish to remain at their

home living independently. There is a limit to the type of work that is considered eligible and the maximum amount payable is £350. Hospital or Community Care Occupational Therapists, Health Visitors and District Nurses, Housing or Environmental Health Officers and General Practitioners can make referrals to the service.

Performance 2005-06			
Scheme	No. of Referrals Actioned	Average Cost per Job	Total Spent
RRAP (WAG funded)	394	£113.28	£44,632
RRAP (LA Funded)	446	£104.07	£46,415

Empty Properties

Empty properties are a wasted resource, particularly in an area where affordable housing is in short supply and can have a detrimental impact on the appearance of a locality and on the health and well being of residents. They are often targets for anti social behaviour and environmental crimes such as graffiti and fly tipping. Their presence can have a direct impact on the regeneration of a locality, particularly where there are high concentrations and those present are in a poor condition.

Pathways to Adapted Housing

Pathways to Adapted Housing was established in conjunction with Pontypridd and District Housing Association to improve housing services to disabled persons. It comprises of a Disabled Persons Housing Register that consists of a register of people who need to move to suitably adapted properties and a register of adapted properties that exist within the county borough via the Common Housing Register. This is complimented by a classification system that matches applicants to properties that will meet their needs.

Pathways to Adapted Housing not only provides a clearer process for disabled applicants to be referred for consideration for adapted housing but also assists in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the housing service overall. This method virtually eliminates the costly process of void properties having their adaptations removed and being offered to general needs applicants when it would be better suited to a disabled person who is also waiting for accommodation.

Pathways can also help determine the “Best Course of Action” where a decision has to be made regarding a Disabled Facility Grant. It can result in a disabled person moving into an adapted property thus saving costs in carrying out an expensive adaptation. It can also assist in the temporary decanting of grant applicants whilst their property is being adapted and/or renovated. Potential savings over DFG installations are approximately £2.3m since 2002.

The Pathways to Adapted Housing Register is also used as an evidence base to determine the need for new adapted housing and assists us in prioritising Social Housing Grant.

Innovative Uses of the Private Rented Sector

In partnership with Hafod Housing Association we have been successfully awarded funding from the Welsh Assembly Government to launch a new private sector leasing scheme ‘Cartrefi Hafod’. We recognise that the private rented sector is currently under-utilised and has the potential to yield quality housing solutions without the need for capital expenditure. The aims of Cartrefi Hafod are to prevent homelessness by adequately housing people before they become homeless and reduce the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation by increasing the supply of quality temporary housing. A further aim of the scheme is to promote and improve choice for clients by sourcing accommodation in high demand areas to enable clients to live in an area of their choice and thus remain close to schools, employment and family support networks. This will improve the quality of life for

temporary housing clients and promote a greater sense of inclusion and well-being.

Regulating our Private Rented Sector

We work with landlords, tenants and our partners to ensure the accommodation in the Private Sector provides a safe, attractive and healthy environment in which to live. The effective management of rented properties is also important, particularly in communities with high concentrations of such properties.

The Council has adopted a Corporate Enforcement Policy that seeks to ensure people comply with the law. Where this is undermined, the Council will use its legal powers to protect our residents and communities. This policy underpins our approach to Housing Enforcement.

We endeavour to liaise with landlords to ensure they are aware of the standards required in rented properties. We also offer an advice service to new and existing landlords to support them as they undertake improvements, repairs and conversions of their properties. In addition, we undertake regular, programmed inspections of houses in multiple occupation and respond to requests for service from tenants concerned about their living conditions.

Where significant hazards are found in a property and particularly where the occupiers are vulnerable and are at risk of injury, we use a range of enforcement options to protect their health and safety. This ranges from service of improvement notices for required repairs to a house, to the issue of prohibition orders to stop the use of whole or part of a property, to the use of emergency remediation notices to effect repair to prevent imminent risk. Where legal documents are not

complied with, we act to prosecute landlords where appropriate and may also undertake works in their default and recover the costs.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System is a new method of assessing housing conditions that uses a set of 29 hazard criteria to identify deficiencies and defects in a property that affect the health, safety and well-being of occupiers and visitors.

Enforcement officers undertook an extensive training programme in the lead up to the change in legislation and as a result we have been using the new standard to determine property conditions since July 2006.

HMO Licensing

In 2002, we introduced a successful County Borough Wide Special Control Registration Scheme for Houses of Multiple occupation that were 2 storey or above with 4 or more tenants. Over 580 properties, mainly in the Treforest Ward, were registered by the scheme.

The Housing Act 2004 replaced registration schemes with new licensing powers for Councils to use for houses in multiple-occupation. It introduced the requirement for local authorities to licence certain types of houses in multiple occupation, namely those of 3 storeys or above with 5 or more tenants. This is termed Mandatory HMO Licensing. The majority of properties subject to the Council registration scheme are small and do not come within the scope of the Mandatory Licensing regime.

The Act also gives local authorities discretion to introduce other types of licensing scheme for other types of HMO. This is termed Additional Licensing.

In October 2006, we began a process to appraise the effectiveness of the 2002 Council Registration Scheme and to decide if there was a need to continue with a form of licensing for HMOs that applied to properties other than mandatory licensing. We consulted with key stakeholders during the process including the Treforest Residents' Association, The University of Glamorgan Registered Landlords Association and the Police.

The outcome of this process concluded that the 2002 Registration Scheme brought many benefits to the tenants of HMOs in the County as it had done much to improve their living standards. There is evidence to support the concern amongst stakeholders that areas with high concentrations of HMOs continue to experience particular problems as a result of poor management. As a result, we have decided to implement an Additional Licensing Scheme for HMOs once the existing transitional arrangements cease in 2009. Such a scheme will apply to 2 storey HMOs and above with 4 or more tenants.

Selective Licensing

In addition to the powers to licence houses in multiple occupation, local authorities also have the ability to licence other types of private rented properties. This is termed Selective Licensing. The purpose of selective licensing is to focus on areas of low housing demand and/or areas that are suffering from persistent problems with anti social behaviour. At present the Council has no plans to introduce any selective licensing schemes in the County Borough. Instead, we are working with the Community Safety Partnership to develop initiatives across the County Borough to tackle problems of anti social behaviour and youth annoyance across all tenures. We are also developing an approach to the re-use of empty properties.

Partnership Working

The private rented sector plays an important role in the housing market of Rhondda Cynon Taff. We are therefore currently involved in a

number of partnerships that involve the private sector as outlined below.

'The Landlord Exchange': A forum for landlords and managing agents from the private sector to come together to network and learn about developments in the residential lettings field. Annual events are held and a regular newsletter is published to keep landlords informed about national and local issues.

University of Glamorgan: We work in partnership with the University to promote the Landlords Exchange Forum. In addition, we work together to ensure that houses in multiple occupation offered by the University through its accommodation service comply with our regulations.

Supporting People Project: The Housing Enforcement team are working with Supporting People to ensure the accommodation chosen by their clients meets minimum standards. This is following the deregulation of many premises providing a minimum level of support by the Care Standards Inspectorate. We aim to work in partnership to ensure that vulnerable adults can be confident that where they live promotes their health, safety and well-being without unnecessary regulations being imposed.

Meeting Our Strategic Objectives

In order '*To encourage a Private Housing Sector that provides a quality living environment which promotes health and well being*' we need to consider what actions we will undertake to meet the strategic objectives we have identified.

Improving Quality of Life in The Private Sector

Strategic Objective 1: To improve partnership working and communication with the Private Sector
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Advice and Support for Landlords and Tenants

We recognise the need to develop a holistic housing advice service in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This would be a service that provides advice, across tenure, to not only enable people to access appropriate housing, but also to signpost people to appropriate bodies/authorities that can assist them in repairing, maintaining, adapting and improving the energy efficiency of their home to ensure it meets their needs effectively. This service would be available to residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf who either rent or own their home, as well as to private sector landlords and other professionals, such as health visitors, who would also benefit from having a single point of contact to discuss concerns they have on behalf of clients in relation to their living accommodation. We will establish a working group to review the role of the Housing Advice Centre and to identify key partners and organisations who can assist us in meeting this objective.

<p>Strategic Objective 2: To improve the condition of properties in the private sector across Rhondda Cynon Taf</p>
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Area Renewal and Regeneration

The Council will undertake a full review of the Housing Renewal Policy in January 2009. We also need to consider undertaking a new Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey to ensure we are targeting resources appropriately. It is anticipated that a further Neighbourhood Renewal Area declaration may be considered. However, at present a review of Neighbourhood Renewal Area operation is being undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government. Undertaking a new stock Condition Survey will assist us in determining the need for and location of a third Neighbourhood Renewal Area.

Strategic Objective 3: To make the best use of existing Private Sector housing stock

Empty Properties

We will develop an Empty Property Action Plan to address the problems associated with empty properties and also to ensure, at a time when there is an insufficient supply of affordable housing, we are making the best use of our existing stock. This Action Plan will include various options for dealing with empty properties and ultimately bringing them back in to use. This will include educating owners about the potential of their asset, actions to facilitate renovation, for example financial incentives and also a clear policy on enforcement action. We have established an Empty Property working group to investigate various funding mechanisms to assist us in our aim, which could include partnerships with local Housing Associations and regional working, for example Heads of the Valley funding. Our approach to Empty Properties is outlined under Strategic Aim 1.

Adapted Housing Register

In order to build on the success of the Pathways to Adapted Housing project we will consider the possibility of widening the scheme to include private sector properties. This will increase the supply of available adapted properties and prevent adaptations that have been made to properties using DFGs being removed by new purchasers who have no need for them, thereby wasting a valuable resource. This approach will require a housing association partner to purchase suitable properties and an awareness raising campaign so that homeowners wanting to sell a property with adaptations are aware of the scheme.

Regulating our Private Rented Sector

Strategic Objective 4: To improve the quality of life and health and well being in areas with high concentrations of private rented accommodation.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System

In partnership with our colleagues in Public Health and Protection and housing associations we will investigate ways in which the new Housing, Health and Safety Rating can be used as part of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy and the Allocations framework for awarding points in respect of housing conditions.

Accreditation Schemes

Through the Landlords Forum and the Local Housing Partnership, we will work with Landlords to ensure that their properties achieve above the minimum standard required by the law, thereby offering a better standard of accommodation to tenants and improving the general appearance of rented houses to the benefit of the locality.

Strategic Aim 3

'To enable good quality social rented accommodation that meets the needs of our communities with a customer focused housing management service creating balanced, socially inclusive, sustainable communities'

'Better Homes for Wales' says... 'We are committed to bringing all existing social housing up to the quality standards, within 20 years. We also wish to promote efficient and effective social housing management, higher levels of tenant involvement, and allocation policies that take into account the preference of tenants, promoting a customer centred approach, minimising the barriers to social housing.'

Our Strategic Objectives

1. To improve the quality of life in the social rented sector
2. To investigate moving towards a more strategic allocation policy to ensure choice is maximised.
3. To ensure a customer focused service

Our Social Rented Sector

Good quality affordable social rented housing has a key role to play in delivering the priorities of local government, including health, education, social care, regeneration and community safety.

Our Local Housing Market Assessment (2006) shows that 15% of the properties in this area are social rented. The main social housing is managed by local based housing providers; RCT Homes with approximately 10,500 properties, Rhondda Housing Association with approximately 1,500 properties and the newly formed Cynon Taf Community Housing Group which includes Cynon Taf and Pontypridd & District Housing Association with approximately 1,700 properties. These Housing Associations are all partners of a Common Housing Register allowing a single point of access for applicants. The remaining of the social rented properties are managed by Housing Associations based outside the area.

Social rented properties exist throughout the Rhondda Cynon Taf area but the number of properties varies between wards. Many of the previous monopolised social rented estates are now mixed tenure as tenants have gradually exercised their 'right to buy/acquire'. However, many of the larger social housing estates still have pockets that are dominated by social housing.

Some social rented stock within the Housing Association sector is pre 1919, but the majority of properties were built in the 1970s and 1980s and are generally traditional style properties, compared with council properties that were mostly built in 1920s, 1950s and 1960s, with approximately 30% of properties of non-traditional build.

What we have achieved so far

Improving Quality of Life in the Social Rented Sector

Improving Property Condition

Council Stock

Due to the age, type and historic lack of investment available to improve the condition of council housing, we consulted with tenants, members of staff and key stakeholders on the options available for improving the council housing stock.

Following a successful stock transfer ballot all council houses were transferred to RCT Homes, a not-for-profit Community Mutual Housing Association in Autumn 2007. A substantial programme of improvements will be undertaken over the next 30 years to ensure that all homes where practical and feasible, are brought up to Welsh Housing Quality Standards by 2012 and maintained thereafter.

A Procurement and Investment Strategy for RCT Homes is currently being prepared which will balance the need for cost effective delivery and attainment of wider social objectives. It will also detail size and value of the contract packages, the areas to be targeted and how the key consultation promises will be met.

Housing Association Stock

All Housing Association new build properties are already of Development Quality Requirement Standard and sufficient resources are in place to improve properties on a cyclical basis to bring them up to Welsh Housing Quality Standard. Housing Associations are currently using their Development Consortia to seek out best price, to balance quality and ability to carry out the work to ensure that all of their

accommodation will meet the deadline and maintain the standard thereafter.

Social and Economic Development

Improving property conditions also has the added value of improving health and the quality of life for residents not only through improving living space, but also by maximising economic benefits to communities and therefore has direct links to our Health, Social Care & Well-Being Strategy. The achievement of Welsh Housing Quality Standard in Rhondda Cynon Taf will enable local training programmes leading to increased local employment opportunities. Housing Associations are already delivering training programmes and employment opportunities to address the skills shortage in the county borough and link at a strategic level with our 'Construction Skills Strategic Group'. The group provides a medium to long-term strategy to address the local skills shortage, and engage local contractors to increase the amount of local apprenticeship schemes. Many local Housing Associations also provide lifelong learning opportunities to tenants where work, education, training programmes and apprenticeship schemes are all linked.

As part of the programme of improvements through stock transfer RCT Homes has also been working with further education colleges to provide a longer-term commitment to training and enterprise. Through their Procurement and Investment Strategy they are also aiming to encourage options for contractors to offer their own training placements and training establishments.

RCT Homes will use large partnering contracts to manage their investment programme and as such must comply with European Tendering regulations. However, RCT Homes will utilise social benefit clauses to maximise the local benefit of the proposed investment.

Housing Associations also provide support to other voluntary organisations by direct financial assistance, professional expertise and management services and the provision of accommodation in order to contribute to community sustainability and improve the quality of life and health and well being of residents.

Communities First

There are 23 Communities First areas across Rhondda Cynon Taf. We work closely with Communities First Partnerships to regenerate deprived areas and respond through estate management practices, repair schemes and by tackling anti-social behaviour.

Strategic Lettings

We currently operate a 'Allocations Framework' in partnership with RCT Homes, Rhondda Housing Association and Cynon Tâf Community Housing Group.

A number of Housing Associations already operate allocation policies with more focus on choice. We have in conjunction with Newydd Housing Association set up a pilot study called 'Valleys Choice Homes' to assess the effectiveness of a choice based scheme. The scheme is currently being fully reviewed following completion of a year of operation. At present the scheme appears to be popular and has reduced turnover rates. This scheme has also been extended to hard to let sheltered units. Advertising properties widely has resulted in an increase in the waiting list and prevented any units in the scheme from being hard to let.

Housing and Community Care already work in partnership and have successfully let five previous difficult to let sheltered housing units for the purpose of hospital discharge. The flats are used temporarily by physically disabled clients who are waiting for equipment or adaptations at their home or while waiting for other accommodation.

Temporary lettings are used to allow clients to 'try' sheltered housing before deciding to move permanently. This scheme will continue by RCT Homes following transfer.

We will continue to work closely with housing providers and other stakeholders to extend these schemes further and develop protocols and practices for joint working between housing, health and community care.

Meeting the needs of our Community

We have established a 'Pathways to Adapted Housing' Register which promotes adapted housing for disabled people by creating a register of disabled persons to match to adapted properties. Pathways to Adapted Housing not only provides a clearer process for disabled applicants to be referred for consideration for adapted housing but also assists in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the housing service overall.

Following research undertaken as part of the Local Housing Market Assessment (2006) we introduced ethnic monitoring on Common Housing Register and Homestep application forms to monitor access to affordable intermediate and social rented housing, in order that services can be adapted as appropriate.

Tenancy Support

As part of Rhondda Cynon Taf's Supporting People strategy, we work closely with Housing Associations and other internal departments to provide support to vulnerable tenants in social rented accommodation. All housing providers assist tenants to maintain their tenancies through providing low-level support via Housing Officers and close partnership working with other service providers. Rent arrears and wider debt problems can have a huge influence on eviction and abandonment. We will encourage housing providers to work closely

with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Dragon Savers to provide debt and housing benefit advice to help tenants to sustain tenancies to link services strategically.

Housing Services have also redeveloped a very difficult to let sheltered complex which consisted of mainly small bedsits with shared bathrooms and poor communal facilities to an Extra Care housing complex. The complex has been renovated to a mix of one and two bedroom flats, with a wide range of communal facilities for the use of tenants and the outside community of older people to assist and encourage people to engage in social activities.

Through this scheme we have also utilised Communities First funding for gardening projects, trips and purchasing equipment for social activities. Other services provided through the complex are meals on wheels and an outreach local police officer and doctor's surgeries.

To promote difficult to let sheltered accommodation Housing Associations work closely with Community Care and Supporting People to ensure that they are notified of all vacancies. We work closely with the Older Peoples Forums, Keep Well this Winter campaign and promote sheltered housing at these events. We are currently working closely with Supporting People and to utilise the former scheme manager's flats for allocation to adults over 50 years of age with learning disabilities.

Housing Management

In the last year Pontypridd & District, Cynon Taf & Rhondda Housing Association have all received excellent/good ratings on Welsh Audit Office Inspections on main aspects of housing management. This shows the commitment from local housing providers to developing and continuing to improve effective housing management services that contribute to community regeneration and sustainability.

We recognise the importance of effective estate management to reduce turnover and we are a key partner in the Community Safety Partnership along with the Police, Health Trust, Local Health Board, British Transport Police, Fire Service, Probation and the Youth Offending Team. The work of the Partnership promotes community groups and Tenants and Residents Associations to be active in helping to identify community safety priorities for their neighbourhoods in line with the national objectives of the National Community Safety Plan (NSP) 2005. As part of this partnership we also work closely with voluntary agencies such as the Crime Prevention panel to address crime problems by education and awareness raising activities with the intention of eliminating or reducing the burden and effect of crime, and the fear of crime in the community.

A recent partnership project has been completed which was funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and looked at multi-agency approaches to tackle anti-social behaviour by early intervention. This new project will be launched in the late summer and findings will be shared with all partners.

We have a service level agreement with Mediation Services to help resolve neighbour complaints and anti-social behaviour on estates to reduce turnover and progress with the prevention of homelessness.

Meeting our Strategic Objectives

In order to provide *'good quality social rented accommodation that meets the needs of our communities and promotes health and well being'* we need to consider what actions we will undertake to meet the strategic objectives we have identified.

Strategic Objective 1: To improve the quality of life in the social rented sector
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Improving the condition of properties in the social rented sector in line with WHQS

RCT Homes estimate the cost of improving homes in line with WHQS will require investment in excess of £780 million over the next 30 years. Works will include new kitchens, bathrooms, energy efficient heating systems, double glazed windows and environmental works.

Through the work of their consortia Housing Associations are seeking further options and best price to improve their homes in line with WHQS. We will continue to work with the two local development consortia, DEVCo and Integrate to ensure that programmes of improvements are in place, which detail how our partner local Housing Associations are working towards the WHQS deadline and also sustained thereafter.

Maximising social and economic development opportunities for local communities through WHQS Plus

We will work with Housing Associations and the newly formed RCT Homes by utilising the sub-groups of the Local Housing Partnership to share good practice and provide a common approach to a procurement strategy to increase levels of employment in the area through training and apprenticeship schemes to provide a long-term commitment increasing the capacity of the local workforce, while specifically targeting inactive groups.

Following our successful Health and Homelessness section 180 bid, we are working with colleagues in health and Community Care to establish joint working practices and protocols for closer joint working between the sectors by linking with and extending the work of the health and homelessness project. Closer collaborative working assists with delivery of joint objectives from other strategies including our Homelessness

Strategy and our Health, Social Care & Well-Being Strategy and provides a holistic approach to tackling deprived communities.

Meeting the needs of our Communities

We will ensure that our allocation framework does not discriminate against minority groups and prevent access to housing. Due to the low number of identified households and the current lack of research around needs of ME households it is vital that further qualitative research is undertaken into the numbers, location and cultural needs and aspirations of ME households to ensure that housing services are not discriminatory and all members of our communities have equal access to housing. We will utilise the findings of this research to influence and inform policy development.

We will aim to improve access to accommodation for all households by researching alternative methods of accepting initial housing applications, this can include internet or telephone access, ensuring that the needs of people who are vulnerable, visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, disabled, or people from minority backgrounds are included by the provision of applications in a variety of formats. We will also work with other local Housing Associations who are not currently part of the allocations framework to ensure that their services are meeting the needs of all members of our communities.

At present there are three separate lists for social rented accommodation, the Common Housing Register, the Homestep Register and the Pathways to Adapted Housing Registers. Therefore, we intend to make access arrangements easier by combining all registers and ensuring a seamless referral system.

Through the Common Housing Register we will work with our partners to improve the monitoring of ethnicity and sexuality on housing application/tenancy agreements to identify households and target further qualitative research. We will then work with partners to share

good practice and agree a consultation strategy which allows full and meaningful consultation with all households. RCT Homes are currently undertaking an options appraisal of all their sheltered complexes looking at the demand, voids, stock type to assess what improvements need to be undertaken to meet current housing needs.

We will work with Housing Associations to raise the profile of sheltered housing to move away from the stereotypical view of sheltered accommodation and consider an innovative alternative use to meet current need.

Strategic Objective 2: To investigate moving towards a more strategic allocation policy to ensure choice is maximised

To investigate moving towards a comprehensive lettings system with more focus on choice

We are committed to working in partnership with voluntary and statutory organisations and individuals to operate an Allocation Policy that meets the needs of both individual applicants and the community as a whole in an effective and sustainable way.

We will review the 'Valleys Choice Homes' pilot study and consider extending to other areas with a view of moving towards a more strategic allocation process to ensure that communities are balanced and sustainable and to address the problems of hard to let, low demand properties. We also intend to identify good practice for the marketing of difficult to let properties.

We will aim to extend the move-on panel to include health and community care representatives and review the current nomination agreements for Housing Associations and extend the use of the Common Housing Register to other Housing Associations operating in this area.

To encourage high quality housing management practices, which maximise the supply of affordable housing, improve the use of empty and hard to let properties, target low demand and social decline, including local lettings strategies

Rent arrears and wider debt problems can be a high influence on levels of eviction and abandonment. We intend to work closely with Housing Associations to undertake a debt mapping analysis to focus on debt prevention and establish a joint approach to a debt referral system for tenants in rent arrears to reduce turnover caused by rent arrears and encourage partnership working between debt agencies and housing providers, while also investigating the need for a joint funded debt and housing post.

We will also continue to work closely with Housing Associations and Supporting People to maximise the low-level support that can be provided by Housing Officers and utilise the medium – high levels of tenancy support that can be provided through the Supporting People Project to help people to sustain their tenancies.

In order to understand why people leave secure tenancies in the social sector to often move into a less secure tenure, we will collate information from exit polls and encourage all social landlords to use one methodology when gathering information at end of tenancy. We will then produce estate profiles across all social housing providers to identify turnover levels at a small scale, linking with any external research projects.

We will work to improve and support partnership working with other service providers to encourage sustainable tenancies by addressing wider estate based problems identified from estate profiles, where possible looking at problems at a micro level, building on links with existing partnerships with Communities First and the Community Safety Partnership to provide a holistic approach to community sustainability.

We will utilise the sub-groups of the Local Housing Partnership to enhance existing networks and partnerships on a more formal setting and use as a tool for sharing examples of best practice in housing management between all housing providers.

We will encourage Housing Associations to support and encourage community groups and tenants and residents groups so they are able to express their collective vision for their community and are empowered to take the lead in achieving the housing vision. We will encourage the community safety partnership, housing providers and Community First Partnerships to create better communication links by establishing a protocol for communication processes.

Strategic Objective 3: To ensure a customer focused service

We will encourage the delivery of more focused customer services and promote estate and area based management, ensuring that staff visit customers at home depending on their preference and/or needs.

We will encourage information sharing between partners and create an effective signposting service between partners for advice, applications and complaints.

Through the Local Housing Partnership we will work with our partner Housing Associations to ensure that all housing management practices fully consider community regeneration, sustainability and promote social inclusion by encouraging the development of tenants groups utilising the Communities First project groups and forums that already exist at a local level.

When planning improvement works in line with WHQS we will work with all Housing providers to encourage them to consult individually with

tenants to determine the design and location of improvement works, thereby considering all tenants cultural and suitability needs.

We are committed to tenant participation and will work with housing providers to develop a benchmark of good practice for local participation which allows all members of our community to be actively involved in decisions affecting the services they receive and be consulted in a manner suited to their individual needs.

Through the Local Housing Partnership we will work with all Housing Associations to encourage the development of Tenants & Residents groups and encourage better strategic links between all community based groups and housing providers and the Community Safety Partnership to encourage active tenant participation in decision making, promoting the national participation agenda.

Strategic Aim 4

'To encourage housing-led regeneration which promotes sustainable development and maximises environmental benefits'

'Better Homes for People in Wales' says ... 'We are committed to promoting the principles of Lifetime homes and barrier free housing across all tenures, promoting sustainable, environmentally friendly, energy efficient housing. We commit ourselves to combating poverty and social disadvantage, and to bridging the gap between the most deprived communities in Wales and the more affluent ones'.

Our Strategic Objectives:

1. To provide housing led regeneration
2. To ensure all housing related projects bring added value by delivering against targets set in other key local authority strategies to provide an integrated approach to sustainable development
3. To ensure that housing minimises environmental impacts, and reduces energy and water usage through effective procurement
4. To improve the energy efficiency of housing across all tenures and work in partnership to eradicate fuel poverty.

What we have achieved so far

Regeneration is a term used to describe a wide range of activities which aim to improve peoples lives and the places in which they live. The potential outcomes of regeneration are significant and can impact on health and well-being, opportunities and aspirations, quality of life and to the overall sustainability of an area. It is widely recognised that housing can play a central role in regeneration through investment, physical improvements to housing and in community development and creating opportunities for skills and capacity building.

Community Regeneration

We have two Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in Rhondda Cynon Taf where programmes are in place to address the high level of disrepair through a process which aims to reverse decline and raise local confidence and pride in the community. Communities First Partnerships are also a key player in tackling deprivation and in terms of picking up initiatives that are not covered by the NRA programme.

The regeneration programme in Mount Libanus is a good example of housing led regeneration and joint working with other regeneration agendas. We worked closely with Rhondda Housing Association and 'CwmNi' Communities First Partnership to seek a community based solution, which resulted in council owned properties transferring to Rhondda Housing Association on a trickle transfer basis. The improvement works contributed to apprenticeship schemes and employment opportunities for local labour and we were also able to lever in European funding for the development of the 'Penyreglyn Project' which continues to provide training and education programmes for the whole community.

We work closely with Llanharry Action for Change Project and Treforest Resident's Association. The Llanharry Action for Change Project obtained European Objective One funding and looks at various areas of regeneration such as: environmental and health improvements, increased adult learning, community initiatives and young people's projects. This project works in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations to provide additional services in the Llanharry area. The Treforest Residents Association has the support of the Area 12 Regeneration Partnership and it also includes representatives from the private and public sector, voluntary organisations and community organisations. We established the Association in partnership with residents to look at the issues and opportunities facing the Treforest area, including housing renewal, environmental improvement and the development of new facilities. The aim of the Partnership is to work together to best address the issues and achieve positive outcomes.

Sustainable Development and Housing

Sustainability principles for the purpose of this strategy are defined as 'embracing social cohesion, economic prosperity and environmental protection through sustainable, environmentally friendly, energy efficient housing'. This can be delivered through the development of new housing in areas which are accessible to amenities, transport links, the types of properties, mix of tenures in addition to the design, construction and the use of materials of the actual property itself. These principles will also bring added benefits to communities by making a positive contribution to health and well being and financial benefits to the occupier through reduced maintenance and energy and water costs.

All Housing Associations are currently working towards WHQS and as such have increased their planned investment ensuring a balance between responsive and cyclical repairs and stock improvement by a partnering approach by adopting the principles of the Egan Report 'Rethinking Construction'. RCT Homes through their WHQS programme

of improvements are also putting plans in place to maximise sustainable development improvements.

Housing Associations are also key partners in ensuring that their development programmes minimise any adverse environmental impacts and embrace the fundamental principles of sustainable development. Housing Associations are required by the Welsh Assembly Government to achieve Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) to eco-homes rating of "good", which encapsulates all aspects of development in terms of the effect on environment with respect to location, choice of materials, energy efficiency, water usage etc. Local Housing Associations are already attempting to achieve a "very good" rating. Some Housing Associations are registered to Green Dragon Level 2 as part of their Environment, Energy and Sustainability Policies which aims to minimise the environmental impact of the delivery of their services and development on the local, national and global environment.

Energy Efficiency

The energy efficiency of housing is one of the three contributory factors of fuel poverty and as such cannot be tackled in isolation. Fuel poverty is a huge factor of social disadvantage in housing, which often affects the most vulnerable members of society.

We have therefore developed a comprehensive Affordable Warmth Action Plan, which tackles energy efficiency and fuel poverty across all tenures. Affordable warmth is a strategic priority for the local authority and this Action Plan also delivers wider objectives within the Community Plan such as improving living spaces through improving housing conditions, social exclusion, boosting the economy by tackling the 'poverty' agenda and the Health and Well Being Agenda by improving health conditions associated with poor housing conditions, in addition to other areas such as education, and environmental improvements by reducing global warming.

We have an officer within the Housing Strategy Team with designated duties as a Home Energy Conservation (HECA) Officer co-ordinating the Council's actions towards Affordable Warmth in the domestic sector, implementing and monitoring Energy Efficiency Programmes and managing awareness raising campaigns to encourage energy efficient behaviour to combat fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions to reduce climate change.

To date we have delivered three 'Here to Help' Schemes in partnership with British Gas. The Scheme was used to install cavity wall and loft insulation to council properties but did not just concentrate on the 'physical' improvements of properties but also assisted households to maximise income and also provided referrals to support networks as necessary to support the householder. We were awarded a Business in the Community Award in 2004 for these schemes.

The largest housing stock in RCT is in the private sector and over the last three years £200k per year has been earmarked for energy efficiency measures and has contributed to including energy efficiency measures in Home Repair Assistance Grants & Disabled Facilities Grants. For the year 2007/08 £200k has again been included in the Private Sector Housing Capital Programme with the objective of supporting delivery of the Affordable Warmth Action Plan.

Training has been provided for front line staff (Environmental Health Workers, Housing, Social Services, Housing Benefits staff amongst others) to help identify 'fuel poor' households in both the private and public sector and link them to available grants for energy efficiency measures, and to provide some free advice on ways to help reduce household fuel bills.

Many advertising campaigns have been undertaken including mailings, leaflet distribution, global emails to staff. We work closely with other campaigns such as Keep Well this Winter. We are also currently

working closely with the Housing Benefits Section to provide energy efficiency advice through the 'Benefit Bus'.

We also have a Service Level Agreement with the South East Wales Energy Advice Centre which allows us to extend our awareness raising further through fuel poverty mailing campaigns, the Healthy Homes Project (which combats poor health associated with cold, damp homes), use of training sessions, exhibitions, use of a free telephone advice service to provide energy saving advice and free home energy checks for householders.

Meeting our Strategic Objectives

In order to *'provide a strategic approach that regenerates communities and promotes sustainable development which maximises environmental benefits'* we need to consider the following objectives.

Strategic Objective 1: To provide housing led regeneration

Strategic Objective 2: Ensure all housing related projects bring added value by delivering against targets set in other key local authority strategies to provide an integrated approach to sustainable development

Community Regeneration

Many regeneration programmes are the responsibility of other agencies and therefore we consider it vital that we undertake an information mapping exercise to identify all related activities within Rhondda Cynon Taf to allow us to provide a strategic approach to reverse decline and regenerate communities. We will extend our existing partnership working to colleagues in highways, health and education to ensure that all sustainable development principles are where possible, maximised in all community regeneration activities. This

will include amongst others improving access to amenities, cycle paths and access to public transport.

RCT Homes as a 'mutual' housing organisation has massive potential to provide housing led regeneration due to its commitment to empower tenants, improve skills and maximise training opportunities. The investment in to the physical improvement of the housing stock will play a central role in the regeneration of many communities throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf.

We will continue to improve existing partnership working between Communities First Partnerships, the Community Safety Partnership and Housing Associations to respond to the 'Community Vision' together in order that projects and initiatives can be joined-up at a local level.

Strategic Objective 3: Ensure that housing minimises environmental impacts, reducing energy and water usage through effective procurement

Sustainable Development and Housing

We are working alongside Forward Planning and Development Control to prepare Supplementary Planning Guidance to ensure the inclusion of sustainable development principles in all new build properties through the S.106 process.

With strategic commitment, careful design, construction and use, affordable, good quality housing can significantly reduce environmental impact at little or no extra cost.

New housing only contributes to a small proportion of the total housing stock in Rhondda Cynon Taf and therefore we are committed to

improving not only new and existing dwellings while utilising sustainable development principles.

We will work with our partners in Private Sector Grants, Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and Housing Associations to ensure a strategic approach to sustainable development by working towards a minimum benchmark level for sustainable development principles in all procurement policies.

We will encourage Housing Associations through their development consortia to develop new properties that assist with the reduction of energy and water usage and set a benchmark of good practice for all new properties built via social housing grant, prioritising bids which achieve this benchmark. In addition to new build properties we will also work with Housing Associations to incorporate sustainable development principles into their maintenance programmes and asset management strategies by creating a common benchmark of good practice. Added financial benefits will also be gained by joint purchasing of materials which will assist in lowering costs.

We acknowledge that sustainable development principles are challenging in our area due to local topography and due to the majority of properties in our area being typically terraced stonewall properties. Therefore we intend to create a pilot project of a number of 'eco homes' in existing terraced properties to raise awareness and showcase the improvements that can be achieved. We are currently working with Cynon Taf Housing Association and the Environmental Improvement/Sustainable Development Partnership to utilise empty properties in a Heads of the Valleys and Neighbourhood Renewal Area to join these regeneration programmes and maximise the outcomes.

In addition to physical improvements we will highlight the importance and benefits of environmentally friendly, sustainable housing to members of the public. Due to the direct links to climate change and

environmental impact we are promoting awareness of sustainable development through various awareness raising activities outlined in our Affordable Warmth Action Plan.

The Local Authority provides a broad spectrum of services through numerous different departments and we are committed to providing an integrated approach to maximising the long-term benefits to the environment. We intend to work with our recycling team to ensure that this information is targeted through our 'Owning your own home' information pack, along with information about energy efficiency and water and waste reduction.

As part of the local authority we have contact with a large workforce, many of whom also live in the Rhondda Cynon Taf area and therefore we will raise awareness through internal communication such as staff training, global emails, internet/intranet adverts which will not only allow people to maximise the benefits at home but also encourage behaviour changes at work.

<p>Strategic Objective 4: Eradicate fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2012, social tenants by 2012 and all households by 2018</p>

Energy Efficiency

Within RCT we have acknowledged that due to the related issues on health, low income levels, social exclusion and deprivation not to mention the impact on climate change and energy conservation a partnership approach is the only way forward. Our Affordable Warmth Action Plan aims to tackle fuel poverty by bringing partners, projects and strategies together under the existing policy and legislative setting to ensure a comprehensive, planned approach to the alleviation of fuel poverty in line with National objectives. Thus, ensuring that people are able to achieve affordable warmth through improving the energy efficiency of their properties regardless of tenure or income.

We have a statutory duty to report on carbon dioxide reductions in the housing stock under the Home Energy Conservation Act (1995), which is currently under review by the Assembly and a new model of reporting is due to be announced shortly. In addition to this method we also report on performance indicators for percentage reduction in energy use and reduction of carbon emissions from the housing stock. We will revise our targets and will work with the private sector grants department, NRAs and Housing Associations to work towards achieving these targets.

We aim to use all our existing data and local information in conjunction with national data to target schemes and grants to the areas with the lowest SAP ratings, deprived areas and low-income households.

However, within RCT over 51% of properties (Energy Efficiency Wales) are considered 'hard to treat', which are pre 1919 terraced properties. In addition to this it is also estimated that 18% of properties are off the mains gas network. Therefore to achieve affordable warmth in RCT activities need to also extend further than the traditional cavity and loft insulation schemes. We will work with our partners to raise the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) ratings of properties in line with the minimum level through the WHQS. Through the Affordable Warmth Steering Group we will continue to target grants and schemes at eligible households but to also research additional initiatives and share good practice for 'hard to treat' dwellings and investigate options for households who do not qualify for the grant schemes.

We will also work closely with the Private Sector Grants Team to maximise energy efficiency measures into the existing grant schemes (where feasible) to install measures in addition to the minimum Building Regulations standard. We will also undertake a pilot programme in 2007/08 using renewable energy solar thermal and/or solar photovoltaic panels and review this for potential inclusion in future schemes, working towards a specific energy efficiency grant. This budget will

also be used to match fund any contributions we receive from the utility companies.

Many households also fall into the category of 'fuel rich' and therefore we intend to maximise the use of incentive schemes to encourage householders to improve the energy efficiency of the properties.

A huge contributory factor to improving energy efficiency is not just the physical improvements of a property but also the behaviour of the occupiers. We intend to continue working closely with our partners to maximise energy efficient behaviour by raising awareness through a comprehensive energy saving advice and signposting service.

Strategic Aim 5

'To ensure that all groups have fair and equal access to housing and information'

'Better Homes for People in Wales' says... 'We would like everyone to have access to free high-quality housing advice and will promote access to specialist housing advice where this is needed. We are committed to making all BME housing matters mainstream to ensure equality of opportunity and the empowerment of all people in Wales'

Our Strategic Objectives

1. To ensure we have a good understanding of the needs of different groups within our community and an accurate and robust evidence base for decision-making.
2. To work in partnership to enable the provision of suitable accommodation which meets the needs of all households within our community.
3. To work in partnership to improve access to information for groups, ensuring information is available in a variety of different languages and formats.

Our Community

It is recognised that Rhondda Cynon Taf is home to people with a wide range of needs and from a wide range of backgrounds. This includes Older People, Minority Ethnic (ME) Groups, Gypsy and Travellers, Migrant Workers, Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People and Vulnerable People.

What we have achieved so far

Older Persons

We recognise that changing demographics in Rhondda Cynon Taf require a change in service design and delivery to ensure the needs of older people are met. In Rhondda Cynon Taf around a quarter of all households contain only older people. With regards to tenure just over 75% of older person only households are owner-occupiers with 28% of older people living in social rented accommodation (Local Housing Market Assessment (2006)) In terms of need just over 10% of all older person only households live in housing that no longer meets their needs effectively. As the population ages, demand for adaptations and other forms of support will therefore increase.

We need to ensure that we provide a wide range of high quality, adaptable homes to suit the variety of needs of older persons and to ensure that older people can fully integrate into society.

Investigations into the housing needs of older persons conclude that older persons want to stay in their own home for as long as possible, adapting their properties where needed. Older persons have demonstrated a need for independence and a determination not to rely on other people for help. As a result it is important that older people have good access to local amenities and public transport. We are committed to the promotion of independent living in a choice of good quality housing that aids integration into the community.

However where it is no longer possible for an older person to remain in their home, support and access to alternative accommodation is necessary. In addition to a number of sheltered housing complexes where older people are able to live in easy to manage, good quality accommodation with support when needed, Rhondda Cynon Taf also has an Extra Care scheme.

Bryn Ivor Extra Care scheme was previously a sheltered housing complex which was refurbished as an extra care facility in recognition of the need for this type of accommodation in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Bryn Ivor now provides much more than a home for life for the residents living in the redesigned one and two bedroom flats in the complex. It has incorporated major adaptations including walk in shower rooms within each flat, an assisted bath and shower room, a mobility scooter store, a large level courtyard garden and an en-suite guest room with excellent facilities that can also be used as respite. The facility includes Telecare, lifeline support equipment with a Scheme Co-ordinator and Support Staff based at the complex providing 24-hour support to tenants living within and linked to the scheme.

We work closely with the Partnership Group for the Older People's Strategy to raise awareness of the availability of grants for energy efficiency. The Older People Partnership Group includes representatives from the Local Authority, Local Health Board, the Police, the private and voluntary sector and works towards developing and implementing the cross cutting theme of older people across the Community Plan to benefit older people. It is a coordinating group for the sharing and dissemination of information relating to older people.

Minority Ethnic (ME) Groups

In 2003 we published our BME Local Housing Strategy 2004 – 2007 in partnership with Housing Associations and other organisations. The strategy complies with the principles of the Welsh Assembly

Government's BME Housing Strategy (2002) and the BME Housing Action Plan (2003). Our BME Housing Strategy and Action Plan established a series of objectives against which a number of outcomes have been achieved.

Research in to the Housing Needs of ME Groups

We undertook a separate assessment of the needs of Minority Ethnic households as part of the overall Local Housing Market Assessment (2006). Due to the small sample size of each of the ME groups was not appropriate to present details of individual groups. The assessment therefore considered the situation of all ME households against that of White British/Irish and other White households.

The survey estimates that over 99% of households in the County Borough are headed by a White person. In total only 0.7% of households are headed by someone who describes themselves as non-White.

We found that ME households have a larger average household size than White households, but also have a larger average home (in terms of number of bedrooms). This means that the average number of persons per bedroom is similar in ME households as White households. With regards to tenure, the study shows that ME households are more likely than White households to be living in private and social rented housing, whilst White Other households are most likely to be owner-occupiers and that they are most likely to be living in the south of the Borough. In relation to income, the study indicates that ME households have a higher average household income than White households and higher savings levels. Furthermore, ME households are less likely to be in unsuitable housing than White households. Overall 99.8% of households in unsuitable housing are White.

Race Equality Scheme

The Welsh Assembly Government BME Housing Action Plan (2003) stresses the importance of producing a race equality scheme which sets out the arrangements to meet race equality duties in policy, service delivery and employment. We have produced a corporate Race Equality Scheme (2002), which was updated in 2005. The Scheme provides the framework for our actions on meeting both our legal and moral responsibilities to combat racial discrimination and promote racial equality within Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Combating Racial Harassment

We work with partners such as the Multi Agency Forum Against Racial Harassment (MAFARH) and the Valleys Race Equality Council to raise the profile of race equality issues and combat discrimination and harassment within service delivery and within our communities.

Housing Associations have individual Racial Harassment policies to address racial harassment amongst tenants. They encourage the reporting of incidents, which will help provide more appropriate support for tenants. Tenancy agreements of all housing providers stress that racial discrimination will not be tolerated and is a breach of tenancy. We encourage the reporting of racial incidents and these are discussed with partners at MAFARH meetings.

Reports of racial graffiti are dealt with as a matter of urgency. Where possible the RCT Cleansing team will remove graffiti that is racist, obscene, offensive in nature, from all properties regardless of tenure within 24hours. There is currently a Performance Indicator to record how many graffiti incidents are removed within 24hours.

There are strict procedures for recording racial incidents. The Racial Incident Reporting procedure has been introduced as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to achieving continuous improvement and equality across all functions.

Contractors

One of our BME Housing Strategy 2004 – 2007 objectives was to raise commitment to race equality among contractors. We have met this objective by producing a Contractors Handbook which outlines how contractors can ensure that racial discrimination does not happen.

Race Awareness

In 2005 all Council and Housing Association staff, tenants and elected members received race awareness training in relation to housing. This was a very successful training programme and gave the opportunity for all levels of staff from different organisations to share experiences and understanding.

Ethnic Monitoring

An ethnic monitoring question is now included on all housing application forms including the Common Housing Register, Homelessness Applications and 'Homestep' application forms to assist us to gain an understanding of the needs of ME groups.

Gypsies and Travellers

Research in to the Housing Needs of Gypsies and Travellers

In line with the Assembly's 'Local Housing Market Assessment Guide' and the objectives contained within our BME Housing Strategy 2004 - 2007 we commissioned a specialist piece of research into the accommodation needs of this minority ethnic group, distinct to the main Local Housing Market Assessment.

The definition of 'Gypsies and Travellers' is

'Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependents educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism and/or caravan dwelling.'

There is limited statistical data available through published sources on the Gypsy and Traveller population in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Currently, there is also no systematic collection or monitoring of information across the Council's service areas. Several specialist agencies were able to provide detailed information from their direct contact with Gypsy and Traveller families. The research estimates that a total of 31-33 Gypsy and Traveller families (households) have been identified as living permanently in Rhondda Cynon Taf on both permanent and non permanent sites and in houses.

The research suggests that the majority of Gypsy and Traveller families living in caravans in Rhondda Cynon Taf are on private sites. Despite the land being owned by Gypsy and Traveller families there is often difficulties in securing planning permission leading to insecurity of tenure. Support is fundamental in ensuring that the treatment of Gypsy and Traveller families on land without planning does not result in homelessness. Housing Strategy currently support planning applications for residential sites made by Gypsy and Traveller families where appropriate.

Currently there are no official sites in Rhondda Cynon Taf, however Beddau Caravan Park is owned by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and was built in 1963 to provide 50 pitches for Gypsy and Travellers and the settled community. Following designation for closure in 1997 many Gypsy and Traveller families left the site. Information regarding demand for pitches is unknown due to the fact that the site does not operate a waiting list. The future of this site requires consideration in itself and as part of the development of sites to meet need in the Borough.

The lack of a waiting list for the above sites means that there is little information around the specific needs and demands for pitches on this site. However the second part of the Gypsy and Traveller

Accommodation Assessment will be a qualitative piece of research and will help identify the requirements of the site residents.

Migrant Workers

VALREC carried out a survey on migrant workers in Rhondda Cynon Taf and found an estimated 600 to 800 migrant workers in the Borough mainly from Eastern European countries.

Housing Strategy sits on the Migrant Workers forum, which is facilitated by the Council's Equality, Diversity and Social Justice Team. The aims of the forum are to increase awareness of the problems faced by migrant workers, work on a multi agency basis to provide support and advice to migrant workers and to assist the integration of migrant workers and their families into the wider communities. VALREC provide regular updates of activities and social events being held for ME groups and Migrant Workers. These updates also highlight current issues and problems faced by this group. As the Forum consists of partners from different organisations within both the private and public sector, awareness of the different problems faced by Migrant Workers is regularly brought to attention.

One of the challenges facing newly arrived migrant workers is accommodation. Some of the issues are scarcity and cost of accommodation, which can often be tied to employment, insecurity of tenure and the potential for racial harassment. The Housing Advice Centre uses Language Line to assist in providing information around housing services for those whom English is not a first language.

The Migrant Workers Forum is also in the process of producing a Welcome Pack which will provide information local to Rhondda Cynon Taf. Housing Strategy is assisting in the production of this pack by producing information relating to housing.

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People

'The housing needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people in Wales' (Spark, 2006) analysed the housing needs and problems faced by LGB people and looked at the role of local authorities, housing associations and other services, including the Police and LGB specific agencies in meeting the housing needs of LGB people in Wales. The study suggests that housing problems and needs for LGB people can often be the result of homophobia from family/friends, carers, landlords, neighbours and local people. This is mainly due to a lack of understanding of the needs and problems faced by LGB people.

Vulnerable People

Supporting Vulnerable People

The Supporting People Programme is concerned with the needs of vulnerable and socially excluded people. The programme funds and coordinates accommodation and support services that help people develop the skills and confidence they need to manage and maintain their home, accepting that the lifestyle choices and decisions people make has a direct and often dramatic impact on their housing, health, wealth and well being. The Supporting People Programme gives the

Council responsibility for planning, funding, and reviewing support services that can help the Council and our partners deliver some of their local and national strategic priorities. We have established a Supporting People Planning and Commissioning Group to oversee the implementation of the Supporting People programme in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The group consists of strategic managers from Housing, Health, Social Care, Probation and a representative of the Supported Housing Sector and is responsible for tasking the Supporting People Team with the practical development of the Supporting People Operational Plan (SPOP). The SPOP is used as a business, commissioning and revenue bidding plan to aid future financial planning and ensure an evidenced based approach is taken to identifying the need for the

development of supported housing services across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Key principles from the Supporting People Operational Plan:

To ensure current and future supported housing services developed through Supporting People Programme remain strategically relevant and responsive to the needs of vulnerable people the following principles have been established by the Council to aid the commissioning process:

- People should have services provided as far as possible in community rather than institutional settings.
- People should be supported as near as possible to their home and existing family networks.
- The capacity of local services to understand and respond to people who are challenging or difficult to engage should be developed and enhanced.
- People should be in settings of no greater security than is justified by the danger they present to themselves or others.
- Service should be designed to maximise rehabilitation and peoples chances of maintaining independent living.
- The needs of people who are challenging or difficult to engage should be responded to by highly individualised multidisciplinary service planning and delivery arrangements.
- Local specialist services should support access to good mainstream services as well as directly serving the most challenging or difficult to engage people.

Vulnerable groups in our Community include

- Women fleeing domestic violence
- People with Learning Disabilities
- People with Mental Health problems
- People suffering from drug dependency
- People suffering from alcohol dependency
- People with a Physical Disability
- Young single homeless people and young people leaving care
- Ex-offenders
- People with a chronic illness

Women Fleeing Domestic Violence

Homelessness data for 2006/07 shows that 45 individuals and their children were accepted as homeless due to domestic violence or the threat of domestic violence. During 2006/2007 397 NME forms were processed for people experiencing domestic abuse.

RCT has 23 units of emergency accommodation and support and on average there are 81 units of floating support specifically targeted at women living in permanent or temporary accommodation who are considered to be at risk of violence, exploitation and abuse.

The principal aim of these services is to work directly with women to help them manage, maintain or move on from their current living arrangements in a planned way.

People with Learning Disabilities

Housing and support services for people with learning disability have been transformed over the last two decades. The All Wales Mental Handicap Strategy (1984) began the transition from institutional care to community care and introduced some core values and principles for services for people with a learning disability. These principles are:

- The right to an ordinary pattern of life in the community.
- The right to be treated as an individual
- The right to additional help and support in developing their maximum potential.

The number of people living in the long stay Learning Disability Hospitals has reduced nationally over the last decade or so. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, none are living in hospital. There has therefore been an increase in the extent and variety of housing and support services based in the community overall. There is no doubt that this move from institution to community has been to the benefit of people with learning disability.

However, currently the extent of provision falls far short of demand and need, placing unacceptable demands on family carers, and restricting choice and opportunity for developing an independent life for many people with learning disabilities. The numbers of people with learning disability who will need accommodation and support in the future is increasing significantly with particular pressure points around young people in transition, and adults living with older carers.

In Rhondda Cynon Taf we have actively worked with registered social landlords and support providers to commission supported accommodation for people with a learning disability. As well as commissioning new supported living schemes, the council has also deregistered the majority of small residential care homes.

Care Management Services have begun to develop a good picture of current and future need, identifying over 170 adults who need to leave the family home or their current living arrangements over the next five years. If we are to avoid homelessness or people's entry into institutional care then both capital and revenue funding will be required to meet the specific housing, care and support needs of individuals with a learning disability.

People with poor Mental Health

Over four out of five people with mental health problems live in mainstream housing, with others living in supported housing or specialist accommodation. Half live alone. People with poor mental health are one and a half times more likely than the general population to live in rented housing. Poor mental health is prevalent amongst people who are homeless with between 30% and 50% of rough sleepers having mental health problems and as many as one in 5 homeless people having a mental health problem and further issues such as substance misuse.

The Council has established an Accommodation Planning Group, of which Housing Strategy and the Supporting People team is a part, to identify and plan for the accommodation and support needs of people with poor Mental Health within the Borough.

Current service referral and needs mapping arrangements indicate that some 186 Needs Mapping Forms have been processed for this client group. This suggests that there are a number of people who are in need of the range of services available.

People with Substance Misuse Problems

Substance Misuse is associated with a wide range of personal, social, economic and potential health problems. Individuals with a substance misuse problem may require several different types of support overtime including support with housing, family relationships, employment, offending behaviour and finance.

The importance of appropriate accommodation and support cannot be underestimated. Without a secure base, the treatment an individual has previously received can quickly be jeopardised and any benefits gained lost. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, current service referral and needs mapping arrangements indicate that some 144 Needs Mapping Forms have been processed for this client group.

Refugees

In Rhondda Cynon Taf, there is currently no specific provision available to refugees as the numbers presenting are very low. In 2006/2007 only 2 NME forms were completed. To ensure people's needs are responded to appropriately services commissioned through the Supporting People Programme do not discriminate against any person on grounds of their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, language, nationality, marital status, political beliefs and religion.

Young Single Homeless People, Young People Leaving Care and Vulnerable Single Parents

During 2006/2007 202 NME forms were processed for people who are considered young and vulnerable and 71 vulnerable for single parents. Homelessness data shows that 24 young people with these needs were considered homeless and in priority need. Other homeless data suggests that 22 people presenting as homeless indicated that the reasons for the loss of their last settled home was that their families were no longer willing to accommodate them.

Much work has been undertaken with stakeholders recently to ensure that the needs of this group are being responded to. Shelter Cymru have been commissioned to explore the key issues facing young people regarding securing and maintaining accommodation within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The outcome of this work will influence future commissioning decisions and service developments for this client group.

Ex-offenders

During 2006/2007 76 NME forms were processed for people who are considered to be ex-offenders who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Homelessness data suggests that 35 ex-offenders were considered homeless and in priority need.

Next to domestic violence, this group presents with the second highest need. The group are considered at risk of becoming or remaining homeless due to the difficulties they experience when leaving an institutional environment. In addition to the difficulties they encounter they are often individuals whose tenancy has previously failed due to their inability to end it properly or pay rent whilst they are in custody.

In response to some of these needs a new Bail Accommodation and Support Service has been introduced by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in June 2007 to enable the courts and prisons to make greater use of bail and early release on a strict curfew.

This is a response to sentencers' requests for additional bail accommodation for defendants who could otherwise be bailed if accommodation was made available. With a target group of 'low-risk' adults on remand or eligible for Home Detention Curfew (HDC), the service has four elements:

- Accommodation
- Support delivered through planned contact sessions
- Breach monitoring and compliance
- Planned 'move-on' and related administration

The service is provided on a regional basis by Clear Springs Ltd, a provider of housing and support to vulnerable people.

Homeless and Potentially Homeless People

During 2006/2007 267 NME forms were processed for people who are considered homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Homelessness data suggests that 188 people with a wide range of needs were considered homeless and in priority need. This suggests that there is a demand for the 104 units of service available. RCT has 486 units of Floating Support, 38 units of Direct Access and 85 units of Temporary Supported Housing. In total there are 609 units of support offering a wide range of support and supported accommodation services. In

2006/07 Homeless Officers made 527 decisions about homelessness and a person's eligibility for housing.

Data analysed by the Supporting People Team suggests that of the 1020 interventions analysed 86% of the people accessing services received support for less than 6 months. 5% of the people accessing services received support for more than 12 months and 2% have been on scheme for over 18 months. High turn over rates and successful interventions means that the majority of people have had their housing support needs met within a 6 month period, these short term interventions have ensured services are redirected to those who are waiting for supported housing and floating support.

Turnover rates in Direct Access Services also appears positive with 78% of people supported moving on within a 3 month period.

Meeting our Strategic Objectives

In order to *'meet the housing needs of all sections of our community by ensuring fair and equal access to housing and information'* we need to consider the following objectives.

Strategic Objective 1: To ensure that we have a good understanding of the needs of different groups within our community and an accurate and robust evidence base for decision making

ME Groups

Whilst a number of the actions included within the BME Housing Strategy 2004 –2007 have been met a number of the actions have yet to be achieved and all of these have been considered for the

development of this strategy. Each of the actions that have not been met have been incorporated into this section and have been placed under the relevant Strategic Objective.

To ensure that our Local Housing System adequately meets the needs of all groups and sectors within our community, we will build on existing research to look at the specific cultural needs of individual groups. Through the Local Housing Partnership we will ensure effective monitoring and information sharing practices are carried out to provide a detailed evidence base for policies and practices. Quarterly monitoring will mean that evidence is regularly kept up to date.

Gypsies and Travellers

To gain a better understanding of the needs of Gypsies and Travellers we will encourage the use of a standard monitoring form to be used by all sections within the Local Authority that have contact with this group. On-going partnership working between various sections of the Local Authority and other organisations will ensure the effective sharing of information. We will establish a corporate working group to include representatives from relevant departments within the Council to develop policies and strategies and gather information to help develop a standard monitoring form.

Migrant Workers

We will work with the Migrant Worker Forum to develop an information database to gain a greater knowledge of migrant worker groups in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Qualitative research into the housing needs of migrant workers is essential to understand the specific needs and to help improve the access to information and services. Through the Local Housing Partnership we will work with landlords to raise understanding and awareness of issues such as HMO licensing.

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People

We must ensure that lesbian, gay and bisexual people can access the same services as others in housing need without being faced with the fear of rejection and discrimination. Through the Local Housing Partnership we will encourage housing associations to monitoring sexual orientation to help us better understand the extent to which LGB people are using our services and will contribute towards policy development.

Strategic Objective 2: To work in partnership to provide suitable accommodation which meets the needs of all households within our community.

Older People

Statistics show that we have an ageing population in Rhondda Cynon Taf. To ensure that older persons have access to suitable, decent accommodation, whilst maintaining their independence, we will work in partnership with other sections of the Local Authority and other organisations in order to make strong links between the Local Housing Strategy, the Health Social Care and Well Being Strategy and the Older People Strategy. Research among older people is essential to understand both the needs and aspirations of this group. Working closely with the Older People Partnership Group we will raise awareness of housing options and assistance that may be available to older people such as DFGs and energy efficiency schemes to ensure their health and well-being. We recognise the considerable number of sheltered housing and other designated older person's housing projects in the borough, and need to develop a county borough wide strategy which includes all landlords for the future of this housing provision to ensure that it is effective in meeting need and demand.

Gypsies and Travellers

As research has highlighted a need for accommodation, investigation of appropriate sites as suitable provision for Gypsy and Traveller families, including the current use of Beddau Caravan Park is essential. We will work closely with our Planning department to ensure that effective monitoring and consideration of site provision is made.

Vulnerable Groups

To ensure that our direct services to vulnerable people are developed and focused and are part of a holistic approach by the Council, we will continue to work closely with Supporting People, Children's & Young Peoples Services, Health and all other partners to ensure this is achieved.

We will work with Supporting People to map need to ensure that funds and services continue to target the most vulnerable and we will compliment this with our own research to ensure that our role in prioritising Social Housing Grant bids and other bidding regimes meets the need of our vulnerable people.

This Local Housing Strategy will provide the prioritisation framework for the bidding cycles and we will encourage housing associations to plan services to the vulnerable in the review and development of their services. Our Local Housing Partnership and our numerous other links will ensure that this is taken forward.

Women Fleeing Domestic Violence

Although direct access and temporary accommodation is a valuable resource that offers a real alternative to bed and breakfast and more importantly refuge from a violent situation, data relating to the use of refuge accommodation suggests 48% of the women accessing refuge provision did not move on within a 6 week period, 28% did not move on

within a 12 week period and 8% did not move-on within a 6 month period. Recognising that refuge is a scarce resource move-on rates need to improve and clear timescales agreed so that women and their families can be re-housed in family accommodation or supported housing within a 6-week period. The approach will ensure that scarce resources are utilised most effectively. To assist in this, we will increase choice and alternatives to refuge through homeless leasing arrangements

From 2008 all Floating Support services will be accessed through the Housing Support Scheme, which will ensure services are prioritised and targeted at those who are homeless or at greatest risk of homelessness. The completion of new refuge provision in Pontypridd will allow the existing refuge to be reutilised to support women with complex and multiple needs. When the new refuge is complete services will be realigned to offer 3 units of temporary accommodation and intensive support.

People with Learning Disabilities

During 2008/2009 services will be reconfigured to create a Floating Support Service for individuals with a specific learning disability. Where possible and where existing resources allow individuals in greatest need will continue to be housed and supported through the wide range of schemes that currently exists. We will continue to work with our housing association partners to develop new and refurbish existing supported housing schemes and we will investigate the use of the private sector to increase the supply of accommodation suitable for the needs of people with a learning disability.

People with poor Mental Health

To ensure that accommodation and support is effectively meeting the needs of people with poor mental health, accommodation and

support offered by some voluntary sector partners is to be remodelled to meet the specific housing and housing related support needs of those who are homeless and those needing to leave institutional care.

Over the next 12 months services will work together to move people into permanent accommodation, releasing the potential underutilised projects have to offer a real alternative to residing in Bed and Breakfast and Hostel accommodation. This development will complement other arrangements being put in place to ensure that Rhondda Cynon Taf's Direct Access Hostel can refer people directly into a range of projects offering temporary accommodation.

People with Substance Misuse Problems

In recognition that some people with ongoing difficulties require long-term housing related support, there is a need to create low-level provision. Whilst the Lloches Scheme is being developed a pilot scheme has been operating, in partnership with the Substance Misuse Team, the scheme has offered intensive and low level support to people misusing substances whose living arrangements are at risk.

With Lloches operational from early 2008 arrangements there is a need to create low-level provision. During 2006/07 £20k was made available from substance misuse services to support the pilot scheme and it is proposed to continue to use this funding and apply for SPG funding to specifically commission a new low level floating support service for up to 40 individuals.

Young Single Homeless People, Young People Leaving Care and Vulnerable Single Parents

The availability of suitable single person accommodation in Rhondda Cynon Taf is in short supply. Without an increase in supply meeting people's housing needs will continue to present difficulties. Data

relating to the use of refuge accommodation, analysed by the Supporting People Team, suggests 40% of the young people accessing direct access provision did not move on within a 6-week period and 12% did not move on within a 12-week period. Recognising that Direct Access is a scarce resource move-on rates need to improve and clear timescales agreed so that young people can be moved-on to supported housing or their own home with support within a 6-week period.

Two schemes, the Old Bakery and the YMCA will be remodelled to ensure services are fit for purpose and meet the appropriate standards relating to temporary accommodation. Projects run by Cynon Taf Housing Group are also to be reconfigured to create additional units of Supported Housing and Floating Support, targeted at vulnerable young people. This new service will offer an alternative to young people being placed in Hostel or Bed and Breakfast.

A review of Barnardos 'open door' project has resulted in stakeholders agreeing that the project needs to be decommissioned.

Ex-offenders

Prison Link Cymru has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that homeless applications are made to housing services long before individuals are released and present as homeless only to be accommodated in bed and breakfast. Adopting a preventative approach to homelessness for this group means that housing provision and services will be better coordinated with improved attempts to allocate accommodation prior to or at the latest upon release, as a persons homeless status has already been determined by Prison Link.

There are four projects currently operating across RCT delivering 28 units, through a mixture of supported housing and floating support. In 2008-2009 the Supporting People Team will establish a task and finish

group involving all key stakeholders to develop a more coordinated and cohesive approach to responding to the needs of this group. The remaining available funding from the de-commissioning of the Barnardos Open Door Project will be utilised to secure additional dispersed supported housing for this client group.

Homeless and Potentially Homeless People

In 2008/09 arrangements will be put in place to support better access, to a range of projects for people who present as homeless and have specific needs. Access to the following supported housing projects will be coordinated through the Direct Access Hostel; Mountain Ash YMCA; Caersalem House; Gofal Supported Housing Projects; Lloches; Project Bridget; Ty Rhondda, The Old Bakery. Access during the day will be coordinated through the Housing Advice Centre.

The re-commissioning of the Cynon Taf Housing Group Project should create an additional 5 units of Supported Housing and 7 units of Floating Support for young people and vulnerable single parents. The re-development of the Women's Aid Hostel and the decommissioning of the Barnardos Open Door Project should create an additional unit for those experiencing Domestic Abuse and those returning to the community, from institutional care. The redevelopment of the Old Bakery will ensure the provision of more appropriate Supported Housing- for young people in need of supported housing. New service developments and project proposals for 2008/09 should see an increase in the number of Floating Support services available to Substance Misusers.

<p>Strategic Objective 3: To work in partnership to improve access to information for everyone ensuring information is available in a variety of different languages and formats</p>

We will ensure that we provide clear information on accommodation and housing services through an appropriately wide range of information formats and channels of communication including audio, Braille, large print and in different languages where required. We will work with our Equality, Diversity and Social Justice Team on a quarterly basis to review the mechanisms used for disseminating information and to ensure that these mechanisms are appropriate and effective.

To ensure that the needs of all sections of our community are recognised we will continue to undertake staff training in relation to race, sexuality, disability and gender. We will also ensure that we carry out Impact Assessments on all Housing policies and practises with the use of a corporate toolkit. Through our Local Housing Partnership we will regularly review and monitor racial harassment policies with the inclusion of the community where necessary and ensure that anti-racist harassment policies and procedures are widely published and are available in different languages and formats. We will ensure through the Local Housing Partnership that Tenants' and Residents' groups operate according to a Code of Conduct on race equality.

Strategic Aim 6

'To promote the homelessness prevention agenda whilst also ensuring appropriate support and sustainable housing options are available for vulnerable homeless people'

'Better Homes for People in Wales' says..... 'We are committed to eliminating the need for rough sleeping in Wales.....We would like everyone to have access to free high-quality housing advice and will promote access to specialist housing advice where this is needed.'

Our Strategic Objectives

1. To reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast and ensure good quality temporary accommodation
2. To increase access to permanent accommodation and offer a range of choice
3. To continue to reduce the number of homeless presentations and representations through prevention work and support
4. To ensure that there is sufficient support available to homeless people and to prevent people from becoming homeless
5. To ensure appropriate services are in place for children and young homeless people
6. To ensure there is adequate accommodation and Support provision available to ensures people do not have to sleep rough.

Review of Homelessness Strategy

Services for homeless people in Rhondda Cynon Taf have undergone a dynamic period of change and development over the past two years. This has included the opening of a new purpose built Housing Advice Centre and the development of a wide range of housing options to meet the needs of homeless people.

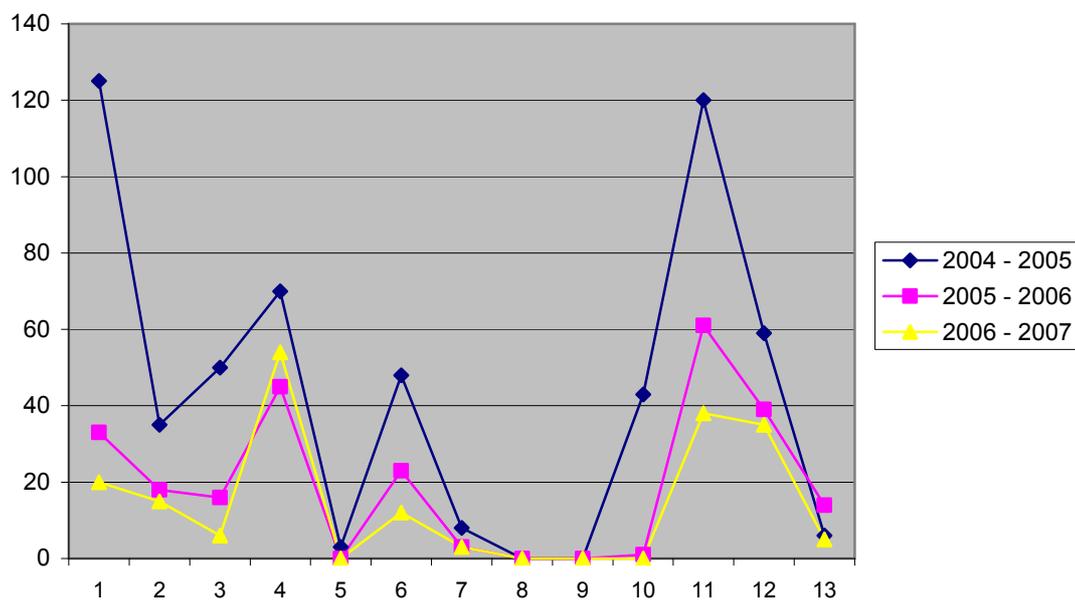
The Local Homelessness Strategy builds on the existing services available which have been effective in tackling homelessness and its causes and consequences in the past. It also focuses on the prevention of homelessness, which will be an integral part of our approach in the future.

Key principles underpinning the strategy are:

- Developing a multi agency approach to tackling homelessness
- Linking in with local and national homelessness strategies
- Developing creative, innovative and flexible approaches to homelessness
- Providing an holistic approach to responding to the needs of homeless people
- Developing evidence based approach to inform continuous improvement in services

Profile of Homelessness in Rhondda Cynon Taf

Reasons for Homelessness 2004 – 2007

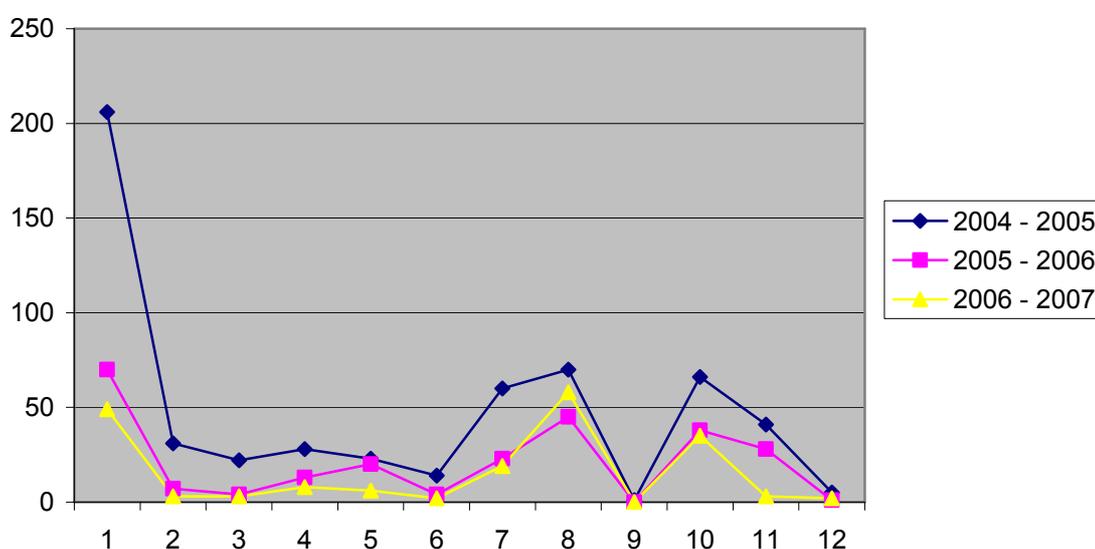


1. Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate
2. Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate
3. Breakdown of relationship – Non violent
4. Breakdown of relationship – Violent
5. Racially motivated violence or harassment
6. Other forms of violence or harassment
7. Mortgage arrears (repossession or other loss of home)
8. Rent arrears on Local Authority or other public sector dwellings
9. Rent arrears on Housing Association or other registered social landlord dwellings
10. Rent arrears on Private sector dwellings
11. Loss of rented or tied accommodation
12. In institution or care (e.g. hospital, residential home, army, prison etc)
13. Other (including homeless in emergence, returned from abroad, sleeping rough or in hostel)

The figures for 2004 – 2007 show almost a 67% decrease in homelessness. This has resulted as a consequence of placing homelessness prevention work at the forefront of service delivery.

The figures show that domestic violence is the largest single reason for presentations from families and single women. Reasons for single men presenting as homeless are more varied and evenly spread among categories such as dispute with family or friends, loss of private rented accommodation and prison leavers. The categories do not show the underlying cause of homelessness for example, drug or alcohol use or mental illness.

Household Type Analysis 2004 –2007



1. Households with dependent child(ren)
2. Households where a member is pregnant and there are no other dependent children
3. Old age
4. Physical disability
5. Mental illness/learning disability
6. A care leaver or person at particular risk of sexual or financial exploitation, 18 years or over but under the age of 21
7. A 16 or 17 year old
8. A person fleeing domestic violence or threatened domestic violence
9. Person homeless after leaving the armed forces
10. A former prisoner who after being released from custody has no accommodation to return to
11. Other
12. Households homeless in emergency

The figures 2006/07 show a decrease in applicants across all clients groups. In 2006/07 applications for Domestic Violence show an

increase on the previous year and applications from prison leavers remain consistent.

Identifying people at risk of becoming homeless.

To prevent homelessness we must assist people to remain in their home and where necessary ensure a seamless transition from one home to another. Most people manage to live successfully in their home but a significant minority end up either threatened with homelessness or actually becoming homeless or sleeping rough. Certain trigger factors identify people most at risk and in Rhondda Cynon Taf include most commonly: people fleeing domestic violence, prison leavers and young people.

What we have achieved so far

Prevention

The increased emphasis on the prevention of homelessness is a significant change in approach both locally and nationally. We must identify those most at risk of becoming homeless, develop services which provide information and education about housing choices, offer a comprehensive housing advice service and provide the appropriate support to prevent people from becoming homeless again.

Prevention in Rhondda Cynon Taf operates on many levels and includes a Homelessness Mediation Service in partnership with the Community Mediation Service, joint protocols with RCT Homes and Children's Services Department to prevent loss of accommodation, provision of the right level of information and advocacy to and on behalf of homeless people, and the provision of services to enable people to live independently.

Reducing the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

The development of a leasing scheme in partnership with Hafod Housing Association has reduced the number of families placed in Bed and Breakfast during 2006.

A successful Section 180 and top up funding from Hafod Housing Association will enable us to further develop a Private Sector Leasing scheme with the aim of providing good quality temporary accommodation for all homeless client groups.

We have also established a Tenancy Guarantee Scheme in partnership with Adref Ltd, an independent housing charity. The scheme enables homeless people who are in priority need to access private rented accommodation via the provision of a paper bond.

Allocations Panel

The Allocations Panel was established in 2006 to determine the eligibility of offenders to go on to the Common Housing Register and to share information enabling the effective management of any support risks. Its membership is currently made up of representation from Community Housing, the Common Housing Register Partners, Probation and voluntary agency Trothwy Ltd. By adopting this multi agency approach agencies can work together to co ordinate and offer support for vulnerable individuals.

Young people

A young peoples multi agency team is based at the Housing Advice Centre and work in partnership to address the needs of homeless young people. The team includes a mediation officer and a social worker and has enabled us to adopt a holistic approach to preventing and tackling homelessness. This approach has been recognised as

good practice by Housemark and has reduced the number of homeless applications made by young people aged 16-21. A successful Section 180 bid will further enhance the work of the team by the provision of a Prevention officer who will work closely with young people and their families following successful mediation. This ongoing support will prevent further family breakdown by supporting the young person to leave home in a planned way.

A pilot project with four local Comprehensive Schools has also been undertaken with Shelter Cymru to provide young people with information about housing choices, an important part of a prevention strategy. Fframwaith have also commissioned research into the accommodation and support of needs of young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf, which will further assist to identify gaps in service provision.

Prison Leavers

Many vulnerable prison leavers are likely to be excluded from accommodation by the nature of the offences they have committed, as many housing providers will not accept people who have a history of serious offences. We are represented on the Multi Agency Public Protection Panel, which includes representatives from the Police, Probation, statutory and voluntary agencies who agree accommodation and support services for high-risk prison leavers. The Housing Advice Centre also works very closely with the Prison Link service managed by Trothwy Ltd to address the housing and support needs of prisoners before they are released. Additionally cases of people who have committed a criminal offence are reviewed at multi agency offenders panel, which involves representation from housing, the police and probation services. The RCT Tenancy Support Project also works closely with offenders to effectively manage any risk.

People with Mental health problems

The Housing Advice Centre works closely with voluntary agency Gofal Cymru who from June 2006 relocated their service to the Housing Advice Centre. This has established positive and strong working relationships on an operational and strategic level. Between April 2006 to March 2007 this service assisted 155 people with specialist housing advice and helped 90 people to access accommodation.

Domestic Violence

Our continued emphasis and continued funding for initiatives such as Project Noddfa, which offers security measures to victims of domestic violence to enable them to feel safe and remain in their own homes is likely to lead to a further reduction in homelessness presentations and repeat applications.

Health and Homelessness

We have successfully received a section 180 bid under Section 126 of the Housing Act 1996 to research and develop best practice and improve operational and strategic links between health and housing in the prevention of homelessness. Housing Strategy will be coordinating the project between the Local Authority, the teaching Local Health Board and Community Care to develop protocols, toolkits and practices for joint working to link with the current RCT Prevention Agenda and assist with the delivery of the National Homelessness Strategy 2006-2008.

This project will help us achieve closer collaboration between all partners around key areas such as hospital discharge, identification of re-housing options, increasing choice, improving life quality, early identification of need and for the support required to assist with sustainable tenancies and will also be key to the delivery of the following strategic objectives.

Meeting Our Strategic Objectives

In order *'To promote the homelessness prevention agenda whilst also ensuring appropriate support and sustainable housing options are available for vulnerable homeless people'* we need to consider what actions we will undertake to meet the strategic objectives we have identified.

Strategic Objective 1: To reduce the use of B+B and ensure good quality temporary accommodation

In order to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation we will undertake an investigation in to the current use of temporary accommodation. We will work closely with Hafod Housing Association to increase the availability of temporary accommodation to single homeless people via private sector-leasing arrangements and continue to develop our range of prevention options . We will also use section 106 agreements and prioritise social housing grant to develop additional one and two bedroom accommodation throughout the borough.

We will monitor the referrals of homeless people to Bed and Breakfast accommodation in order to ascertain why that accommodation is used. The outcome of this monitoring will be used to assist with the development of new service provision.

We will develop protocols and undertake joint training with the Council's Central Control Team which has responsibility for placing homeless households out of office hours to involve and inform staff on prevention options and enhance effective joint working.

We will work closely with Private Sector Landlords and local Housing Associations to ensure that working arrangements are in place to provide suitable accommodation for homeless people. We will

undertake research into the need for accommodation for difficult to place single people particularly those with an offending behaviour including the identification of existing schemes which are difficult to access by homeless households with challenging behaviour.

Strategic Objective 2: To increase the access to permanent accommodation and offer a range of choice

The likelihood of homeless people succeeding in new permanent accommodation depends to a significant extent on the appropriateness of the accommodation. By re-housing homeless people as appropriately as possible and providing support we improve the chances of the tenancy succeeding and so reduce the likelihood of people becoming homeless again. We will work closely with local housing associations to continue to improve choice and access to social housing and will investigate extending the Common Housing Register to all housing associations in the area. We will improve monitoring of offers of accommodation by location and property size made to homeless applicants. We will also work with the Credit Union to offer loans for bonds to enable access to the private rented sector for non- priority homeless client groups, which will compliment the existing Tenancy Guarantee Scheme.

Strategic Objective 3: To continue to reduce the number of homeless presentations

As most of our homelessness presentations relate to domestic violence we will continue to work with our partners to develop strategies to prevent domestic violence resulting in the homelessness of the victim. We will work more closely with housing providers to ensure joint decisions are made for shorter sentence prisoners who have a tenancy, to ensure entitlement to Housing Benefit to prevent loss of accommodation. In future we will request information on possession orders and evictions in order to identify areas where evictions are

common and explore reasons for this in order to prevent homelessness where possible.

In relation to the Allocations Panel, we will review the membership of the panel and existing working arrangements to evaluate the impact of Panel decisions and monitor the number of Exclusions / Suspensions which prevent access to the Common Housing Register.

Strategic Objective 4: To ensure that there is sufficient support available to homeless people and to prevent people from becoming homeless

We recognise that successful resettlement and transition in to independent living depends on the provision of support as well as suitable accommodation. We will ensure that our direct services to vulnerable people are developed and focused and part of a holistic approach by the Council. This will include joint training with housing staff and community care and continuing our work with the RCT Tenancy Support Project to ensure referrals for cases of repeat homelessness are prioritised.

We will work with Supporting People to map need to ensure that funds and services continue to target the most vulnerable including the prioritisation of Social Housing Grant for new schemes and development. We will also encourage housing associations to plan services to the vulnerable in the review and development of their services.

Strategic Objective 5: To ensure appropriate services for children and young people

16 and 17 year olds who present as homeless are often deeply affected by their background and vulnerable. It is vital that homeless young people are placed in appropriate temporary and permanent

accommodation with access to relevant support. We therefore need to develop a wide range of accommodation options to meet the needs of this particular group and identify needs and gaps in service provision arising from the research and ways to fill these gaps. We will also need to be involved in the Young Peoples Accommodation Task Group to develop alternative forms of temporary accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.

In order to further reduce homelessness applications made by homeless 16 and 17 year olds and in recognition of the role played by mediation in prevention work, a pilot project is to be established between housing, Children's Services and the Community Mediation to work with families who live with young people aged 14 plus to provide early intervention services to minimise family tensions and ensure young people leave home in a planned way.

Education around housing options is crucial if young people are to make suitable and appropriate housing choices. We will identify resources for the continued delivery of the Housemate programme in comprehensive schools and we will also work closely with Fframwaith, Children's Services, the Youth Offending Service and Shelter Cymru on the research currently being undertaken into the housing needs of young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

In order to ensure care leavers are accommodated appropriately and do not become homeless in the future we will attend care leaver planning meetings and ensure that Care Leavers are properly considered and given sufficient priority on the Common Housing Register.

Strategic Objective 6: Ensure there is adequate accommodation and support provision available that ensures people do not have to sleep rough.

Frequent attempts are made to estimate the number of rough sleepers in the borough. The last rough sleeper count conducted in March 2007, identified two rough sleepers. Whilst the level of rough sleeping in the valley areas appear to be low this situation may worsen without positive action to find solutions. Major contributory factors include a shortage of affordable suitable accommodation.

The Rhondda Cynon Taf Direct Access Hostel opened in 2004 and since that date 237 homeless people have made use of the facilities available. The majority of which would have had no other alternative accommodation at the time.

As well as meeting people's immediate needs the hostel provides support and resettlement services to ensure residents who move on are provided with the necessary skills to live independently.

In order to meet the needs of growing numbers of people who are unable to access the hostel owing to the lack of beds, Adref Limited who manage the hostel are currently financing works to provide an additional two bed spaces at the hostel. We are also exploring the development of a Night shelter in the Borough to meet the needs of rough sleepers during the winter months.

Additionally the Street-smart Project, located at the hostel is due to become operational as from October 2007. This will offer those unable to access the hostel due to lack of available bed space, advice on benefits, accommodation options and support with health issues.

GLOSSARY

Able to Pay (Fuel): Households where income levels are above the threshold for means tested grants and are considered able to pay for energy efficiency measures.

Accessible homes: Homes that can be used by anyone irrespective of whether they are able bodied, disabled or infirm.

Affordable Housing: Housing provided to those whose needs are not met by the open market. Affordable housing should meet the needs of eligible households, be available at low enough cost for them to afford, determined by local incomes and local house prices. Affordable housing can be provided as **Social Rented Housing** and **Intermediate Housing**.

Affordable Warmth: is the ability to heat your home to an adequate standard at a reasonable cost, without having to economise on other equally important outgoings such as food. An adequate standard is defined by the World Health Organisation as 21C in living areas and between 18C -21C in bedrooms

Allocations Policy: System by which tenancies are granted, usually using a waiting list of eligible applicants.

Community Housing Mutual: The Community Housing Mutual has been developed by the Welsh Assembly Government as their preferred model for stock transfer organizations. It is a local 'not for profit' landlord established by the Council. The Community Housing Mutual differs from traditional housing associations because its rules state that it must actively encourage tenants to become more proactive in the management of their homes and share decision making.

Capital Receipts: Money received by the Council from the sale of housing stock or land.

Deprived areas: Run down areas where people generally live on low incomes and are disadvantaged.

Eco-friendly: A property which is relatively less damaging to the environment. This can be in terms of air pollution, waste disposal, location and materials used.

Fuel poverty: A fuel poor household is one that needs to spend more than 10% of household income on all fuel use in order to have heating at a satisfactory level.

Gypsy & Traveller: Used to describe all the different groups of Gypsies and Travellers. Separate groups of Gypsies and Travellers include Welsh and English Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish Travellers and New Age Travellers. Gypsies were recognised as a traditional ethnic group in 1989 and Irish Travellers in 2000; each group has a separate and distinct cultural identity.

Homebuy: Funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and operated by partner Housing Associations on our behalf. Homebuy enables you to purchase a property on the open market anywhere within RCT and receive an interest free loan for 30% of the total cost. The loan only needs to be repaid to the Housing Association if the property is resold in the future.

Homestep: A scheme operated by RCT CBC in partnership with Housing Associations, Private House Builders and the Welsh Assembly Government to provide Low Cost Home Ownership products to people who are in a financially stable position yet still unable to purchase a home outright without assistance.

Housing Association: This is a 'not for profit' organisation registered with and regulated by the Welsh Assembly Government. They primarily exist to own and manage affordable rented social housing.

House in Multiple Occupation (HMO): – Bedsits / flats normally with self-contained rooms with either cooking facilities in the room or a shared kitchen or shared bathroom and toilet facilities. Under the Housing Act 2004 it also covers any property occupied by more than one household that is a converted building even if the flats are not self contained.

Housing Providers: Landlords of social housing such as local authorities, Housing Associations, which also includes trusts and co-operatives.

Intermediate Housing: Housing for sale at below open market levels usually referred to as **Low Cost Home Ownership**.

Lifetime homes: Have sixteen design features that ensure a new house or flat will meet the needs of most households, from those with young children through to frail older people and those with temporary or permanent disabilities.

Local Housing Market Assessment: The survey provides an assessment of housing need for an area, including the extent and pattern of need. In addition it examines both aspirations and demands for the communities and households of the area. It covers all forms of tenure and considers the link between housing costs and income levels. It provides robust information at a local level to guide the location of new housing provision and support Local Plan Policies.

Low Cost Home Ownership Scheme: Property available for people whose incomes, whilst insufficient to buy or rent on the open market, can afford housing which has a level of subsidy to reduce cost below general market levels. There is usually a local eligibility criteria in place to assess people who would like to purchase a property through the scheme.

Minority Ethnic Groups (ME): People who belong to a discreet racial or religious group who are not part of the majority.

Nominations Agreement: An agreement between the local authority and housing associations to accept a minimum number of homeless persons for housing over a specified period.

'Right to Buy': Scheme set up which enables council tenants to buy their home from the council.

Section 106 Agreement: A planning obligation or agreement under the Town & Country Planning Acts where planning approval is granted subject to a voluntary agreement between the local planning authority and the developer. It will determine the method of achieving a quota of affordable housing on a development site.

Sheltered Housing/Units: Housing for older persons who require additional support with their day-to-day lives. Levels of support vary according to the classified category of the individual scheme.

Social Exclusion: The Government has defined social exclusion as being a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. It can also have a wider meaning, which encompasses the exclusion of people from the normal exchanges, practices and rights of society.

Social Housing Grant: A Capital grant provided by the Welsh Assembly Government to fund Housing Associations to develop social housing.

Social Rented Housing: Housing which is provided for rent at below market cost for households, provided by either local authorities or Housing Associations.

Stakeholders: People who have a vested interest in what happens either through living in an area or working in relation to what happens.

Stock: Types of accommodation such as houses, flats, bungalows or apartments.

Stock Transfer: Voluntary transfer of ownership and management of Council Housing Stock to a Housing Association, which could either be on a small (estate based) or large scale (whole stock) transfer

Strategic Lettings: Housing allocations policy designed to achieve strategic objectives E.g. under letting policies may be adopted to reduce child density on Housing Estates.

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG): The purpose of Affordable Housing SPG is to provide a detailed explanation of how affordable housing policies should be implemented. It is a guidance document that will set out the Council's requirements for the type of affordable housing required in new developments for developers, housing associations and the wider public and sets a framework for negotiations. It is in effect the tool that ensures that affordable housing requirements are not omitted from the planning process when planning applications are submitted and negotiated.

Sustainable Communities: Places where people want to live and work, now and in the future.

Sustainable Development: Development that ensures that the use of resources and the environment today does not damage prospects for use by future generations.

Sustainable Economic Growth: An increase in jobs and income that is on going through time.

Sustainable Tenancies: Tenancies that provide appropriate housing in terms of size and location, where people want to remain for now and in the future and ifv required have access to support to do so.

Temporary Stopping: Used to describe families living in caravans on land with both the owner's permission and legal permission.

Tenure: How people occupy a property by owning, renting or a combination of both.

Trickle Transfer: Gradual transfer of Council Housing Stock to a Housing Association, usually at a nominal price when properties are un-occupied.

Vulnerable people: Although not exclusive, people may be considered to be vulnerable through a disability, specific emotional needs, illness, age, race, communication barriers or anything that prevents them from engaging fully in society.

Welsh Housing Quality Standard: A common target standard set by the Welsh Assembly Government to improve the physical conditions of all existing social properties (where feasible) in Wales by 2012.