

TITLE	Housing Strategy 2015–18
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 19 February 2015
WARD	None specific
DIRECTOR	Heather Thwaites, Director of Environment and Stuart Rowbotham, Director of Health and Wellbeing
LEAD MEMBER	John Kaiser, Executive Member for Planning and Highways

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure that all residents can access well-designed, affordable and sustainable homes and effective support services in Wokingham Borough. The Strategy aims to:

- Address our housing needs
- Support vulnerable people
- Tackle homelessness and housing need
- Enhance tenant services
- Expand opportunities

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopt the Housing Strategy 2015–2018.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

All housing authorities must have in place a Housing Strategy setting out the Council's ambitions for housing provision, investment and management. The Council's previous Housing Strategy covered the period from 2010 to 2013. There have been significant changes to the housing agenda over this period and it is therefore timely that the Council reviews its strategy for housing.

The strategy aims to build upon successes and learning from the Housing Strategy 2010 to address future challenges. The strategy highlights 5 strategic priorities to:

- 1) Address our housing needs
- 2) Support vulnerable people
- 3) Tackle homelessness and housing need
- 4) Enhance tenant services
- 5) Expand opportunities

Following public consultation on the draft strategy in November/December 2014, there was general consensus that the proposed strategy was the right approach. Those that disagreed with the strategy felt that more residential development in the area was not appropriate and had concerns about the balance of infrastructure, housing and loss of

green space. As the detailed breakdown of comments provided in Appendix 2 shows, there was broad support for the aims of the strategy and no changes to the document were proposed.

The only amendments to the final strategy version are the inclusion of Appendix 1, which contains the action plan, and Appendix 2, a summary of the consultation.

Background

All housing authorities must have in place a Housing Strategy setting out the Council's ambitions for housing provision, investment and management. The Council's previous Housing Strategy covered the period from 2010 to 2013. There have been significant changes to the housing agenda over this period and it is therefore timely that the Council reviews its strategy for housing.

The strategy is the result of detailed research and ongoing engagement with our stakeholders on housing in the Borough.

Analysis of Issues

Wokingham is a generally prosperous Borough that is often regarded as one of the best places to live in the Country. However, the success of the area does bring with it challenges. House prices in the Borough are well above the national average leading to affordability issues for local people and key workers. As of June 2014, the average price of a house in Wokingham is £307,756, about 5% higher than the maximum values pre-economic downturn. Private sector rents are also high in comparison to average figures for the south east. As a result, there is a significant need for, and shortfall in, affordable housing in the Borough.

A good choice of high quality housing will help the Borough achieve many of its ambitions, including its vision to be "a great place to live, an even better place to do business". For instance, good quality settled homes can help to improve a child's life chances by providing the right environment for educational attainment. They can also help to improve the health and wellbeing of the Borough's residents. As part of the wider Thames Valley Berkshire functional economic area, the Council has committed to growing the local economy, which will also benefit from a healthy and competitive housing market.

The strategy aims to build upon successes and learning from the Housing Strategy 2010 to address future challenges. The strategy highlights 5 strategic priorities to:

- 1) Address our housing needs
- 2) Support vulnerable people
- 3) Tackle homelessness and housing need
- 4) Enhance tenant services
- 5) Expand opportunities

In November 2014 we ran a public consultation on the draft version of the strategy. A total of 18 responses were received. There was general consensus that the proposed strategy was the right approach. Those that disagreed with the strategy felt that more residential development in the area was not appropriate and had concerns about the balance of infrastructure, housing and loss of green space. Some commented that there should be more partnership working. Moving forward we will be working more closely with partners through forums such as the Wokingham Housing Delivery Group. Some felt there should be more focus and information around the priority of addressing the housing needs of vulnerable people. As the Housing Strategy is intended to be an overarching "umbrella" strategy into which other strategies such as the Older People's

Housing Strategy and Young People’s Housing Strategy will feed into, it was felt that this strategy should be kept focused and concise and the other strategies would contain the more detailed information. There were also comments around the need to consider other infrastructure and protecting green space in light of new developments across the borough. These are all being considered as a necessary part of the planning process.

When asked what challenges the borough is facing in terms of housing, responses included pressures on land, lack of affordable housing, rising house prices, providing housing for older people and vulnerable people. Some of these issues we have directly tackled within the strategy such as providing more affordable housing and housing for vulnerable people (including older people). Whilst we are unable to directly tackle market forces such as rising housing prices, we can ensure that we try and meet the housing needs of residents by providing more interventions within the private rented sector and more affordable housing.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Implementation of the Housing Strategy will shape and influence how resources are spent and how services will be delivered over the next three years. Any decision requiring Executive approval would come back as a separate report.

Cross-Council Implications

Ensuring that all residents can access well-designed, affordable and sustainable homes and effective support services forms a key part of the Council’s vision and priorities; “A great place to live, an even better place to do business”, with the priorities in delivering this vision including providing affordable homes, supporting vulnerable people, tackling homelessness and housing need and improving the housing service. The Strategy has been developed in close consultation with other Council services.

List of Background Papers

- Older People’s Housing Strategy 2014-2019
- Young People’s Housing Strategy 2014-2019
- Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018
- Housing Facts and Figures Report

Contact Frances Haywood	Service Economic Sustainability
Telephone No 0118 974 6859	Email frances.haywood@wokingham.gov.uk
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Housing Strategy 2015-18

UNCLASSIFIED

Summary of Housing Strategy 2015-2018

"All residents can access well-designed, affordable and sustainable homes and effective support services in Wokingham Borough"

	Addressing our Housing Needs	Supporting Vulnerable People	Tackling Homelessness and Housing Need	Enhancing Tenant Services	Expanding Opportunities
Since 2010, we have:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built 393 new affordable homes in the Borough between 2010 and 2014. • Assisted a further 75 residents access home ownership through equity loan schemes. • Completed our first rural exception housing scheme. • Established our own Local Housing Company, WHL • Implemented new housing standards through our Managing Development Delivery Local Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed 2 Extra Care Housing Schemes at Alexandra Place and Beeches Manor • Set up a Young People's Housing Panel • Increased the housing options for other vulnerable groups, including the recently completed Hillside Park development. • Launched the Wokingham Home Refuge Scheme for people at risk of domestic abuse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintained low levels of homeless acceptances and repeat homelessness • Helped 208 families and 125 single people access the Rent in Advance/ Deposit Loan scheme. • Improved our temporary accommodation in central Wokingham • Launched our Accommodation Finder Scheme to help vulnerable people to find privately rented housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchased our Council housing stock from Government • Secured £5.2 million of funding for the Decent Homes backlog. • Signed up to retaining Right to Buy receipts. • Developed a clear Asset Management Strategy. • Consistently improved customer satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented a furniture recycling scheme • Helped to tackle fuel poverty through the 'warm and well' scheme • Assisted 15 people set up a business through our first Strive course. • Helped organise a 'Live Well and Spend Less' event.
In the next 3 years, we aim to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete 1,000 additional affordable homes • Help young people get on the housing ladder by expanding our intermediate housing offer, including completing our first self-build project • Adopt a Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan • Work with WHL to deliver new schemes across the Borough, including Phoenix Avenue • Review the support we offer low income households living in the private rented sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete at least 2 further Extra Care Housing schemes and seek to stimulate private sector provision • Extend the housing options for vulnerable young people, including re-commissioning supported housing at Seaford Court • Improve access to information, advice and guidance on housing • Develop more supported housing for vulnerable people • Continue to provide a range of housing support services to help vulnerable people live independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to focus on the prevention of homelessness and find creative solutions to help our customers. • Ensure that housing options & advice services remain accessible and relevant, with clear pathways for young people. • Help people access private rented housing, through schemes such as the Rent in Advance/ Deposit Loan Scheme • Continue to improve the temporary & emergency accommodation offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet the Decent Homes Standard by April 2015 and maintain the entire stock at this standard. • Introduce new Tenancy agreements and Tenant handbook for tenants. • Explore development, acquisition & disposal opportunities • Be more responsive and creative in the housing offer we give our older and younger tenants. • Continue to empower our tenants & improve customer satisfaction. • Strive for greater efficiencies in service provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to expand employment and training opportunities • Offer a joined-up housing and employment advice service for young people at "Elevate Wokingham" • Run more Strive courses to help residents establish new businesses • Examine funding opportunities to continue preventative projects, such as, 'warm and well'.

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Foreword – Cllr John Kaiser

Housing plays a huge role in the health, environmental and economic well-being of everyone who lives in the borough. With the significant growth of housing through the delivery of our four SDLs, we have a real opportunity to help shape the housing offer and align wider infrastructure investment to the needs of all our residents. Our Housing Strategy sets out our ambitious plans to increase the supply of affordable housing in the Borough across a mix of tenures. We have led the way in establishing our own housing company, Wokingham Housing Limited (WHL), to make sure we achieve both the quantity and quality of affordable housing we aspire to deliver. The creation of WHL and planned investment within the council's housing stock will help to ensure that we have good quality, affordable housing stock which will serve us well in the forthcoming years and decades.

The vast majority of housing in the Borough is privately owned, as will the new housing developed in the coming years. We recognise that our scope of influence is most restricted in this sector, but we will aim to ensure that all homes are of a good quality, safe and secure. Through our planning policies, we can help shape the environment in which we live and work. The adoption of our Local Plan incorporating standards on lifetime homes, space and design is an example of how we can improve the quality of housing across all sectors.

As a forward thinking authority, we continue to work with partners and other agencies to explore innovative models of affordable housing and the creation of wider opportunities. This is not just for families, but across all our residents including young people, older people and those who are vulnerable. For example, through our Young People's Housing Strategy, we have made a commitment to increase the availability of local affordable housing for young people. We have also made a clear commitment to develop our first community self-build project in the Borough by 2018. This will not only help residents access the housing market, but also develop their skills within construction and give them a real sense of pride and achievement.

This is an ambitious strategy with a lot to deliver. I fully intend to grasp the opportunities this provides to ensure this borough is a great place to live and an even better place to do business.

Councillor John Kaiser
Executive Member for Planning and Highways

1. Introduction

Wokingham Borough is changing. Over the coming years, we are going to see significant housing growth as we deliver over 13,000 new homes and expand four communities. We need to ensure that these homes are fit for the future and make a positive contribution to addressing our housing priorities.

Wokingham is a generally prosperous Borough that is often regarded as one of the best places to live in the Country. However, the success of the area does bring with it challenges. House prices in the Borough are well above the national average leading to affordability issues for local people and key workers.

A good choice of high quality housing will help the Borough achieve many of its ambitions, including its vision to be "a great place to live, an even better place to do business". For instance, we believe that good quality settled homes can help to improve a child's life chances by providing the right environment for educational attainment. We also believe that good housing and housing services help to improve the health and wellbeing of the Borough's residents. As part of the wider Thames Valley Berkshire functional economic area, we have committed to growing the local economy, which will also benefit from a healthy and competitive housing market.

This Housing Strategy sets out the Council's ambitions for housing provision, investment and management for the next 3 years. It describes how we intend to use our resources and influence partners and the private sector to help us achieve our goals.

2. Local Context

Wokingham Borough had a population of 154,380 at the time of the 2011 Census, which has increased significantly since 1971. Similarly there has been a rapid rate of household growth over the last three decades. The number of households in the Borough was 60,300 at the time of the 2011 Census, and the UK Government has estimated that this will grow to 71,000 by 2021. Average household size has fallen and this trend is also expected to continue.

The population of the Borough is largely affluent, with high levels of house owner occupation and car ownership. A high percentage of residents work in managerial and professional occupations and unemployment is consistently low. Wokingham is consistently scored in the Top Ten Places to live in the country in national surveys, due to factors, such as, high earnings, excellent schools, good health and long life expectancy. However, the downside of Wokingham's popularity is the high cost of housing.

Land Registry figures show that the average price of a home in Wokingham in June 2014 was £307,756, about 5% above the maximum values pre-economic downturn. Average house prices for Wokingham are still substantially higher (79% more) than the national average of £172,011.

In Wokingham, a family would require a deposit of almost £70,000 and an annual income of over £61,000 to afford an average priced property, assuming the purchaser was obtaining an 80% mortgage (putting down a 20% deposit) and that a lender was lending at 3.5 times income. A single person purchasing a one bedroom property in Wokingham would require an income of over £43,000 together with a deposit of over £37,000.

Renting continues to remain more affordable than buying in the Borough, although it is relatively high when compared to south-east figures.

There has been and continues to be a significant need for, and shortfall in, new affordable housing in the Borough. In June 2014, there were 2,351 people on Wokingham's Housing Register. This figure fluctuates between 2,400 and 2,700. The Housing Needs Team has seen a significant increase in the level of homelessness presentations over the past year, although homelessness acceptances have remained low.

The Council regularly tracks trends in the housing market and in housing need. A quarterly facts and figure report is available to download from:

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/council/decisions/policies/?categoryesctl5148227=3763&assetdet6360345=245359&categoryesctl7234297=7738>

An update to the Housing Needs Assessment was commissioned by five Berkshire Authorities and completed in February 2012. The updated assessment reinforced the need for continued delivery of affordable housing in the borough, with key findings including the following:

1. There is a need for at least 390 units per annum of affordable housing (excluding shared ownership) in Wokingham Borough.
2. Most of the 2,500 households identified as in housing need have very low incomes and would ordinarily be accommodated in social rented homes (i.e. traditional council or housing association properties let at circa 50–60% of a market rent), supported by Housing Benefit
3. Households require a minimum income of £23,800 to access an average 1 bedroom property in the private rented sector.
4. An affordable rented property (80% of market rent) would be accessible for those on Housing Benefit (albeit only in certain parts of the Borough). A working household would require an income of between £18,000 and £19,500 to access and afford a 1-bedroom affordable rent property
5. Only around 12% of those on the housing register have an income sufficient to afford Affordable Rent (80% of market rents).

3. Strategic Priorities

Through consultation with our stakeholders, we have identified five strategic priorities for housing over the next three years. These seek to build on the key aims of the 2010 Housing Strategy. The strategic priorities are as follows:

- 1 Addressing our Housing Needs

- 2 Supporting Vulnerable People
- 3 Tackling Homelessness and Housing Need
- 4 Enhancing Tenant Services
- 5 Expanding Opportunities

The next few sections will elaborate more on these strategic priorities, including identifying key actions that will be undertaken over the next three years.

3.1 Strategic Priority 1 - Addressing our Housing Needs

Wokingham Borough is set to experience significant housing growth as we deliver over 13,000 new homes and expand four communities. With first completions coming through on the Strategic Development Locations (SDLs), it is clear that this is an excellent opportunity to deliver much-needed affordable housing in the Borough.

Over the next 3 years, we will aim to complete 1,000 additional affordable homes across a range of tenures. This will include traditional social rented housing and shared ownership housing to meet the needs of aspiring home owners. We also intend to expand our offer to households (particularly young people) that are struggling to afford housing in the private sector, but do not necessarily need social housing, by looking to encourage new tenures and housing options. These will include more sub-market rented properties to help lower income households, as well as completing our first self-build project. A survey of residents in 2014 identified 228 households with an appetite to get their hands dirty and build their own homes. The Council is currently working to identify a suitable site to take the project forward. The project will not only help households secure a roof over the heads, but will also engender a sense of community pride and help participants develop new construction skills.

Although a high proportion of applicants on the housing register require smaller properties, there tends to be a higher turnover of available and suitable homes for this group. A more detailed review of our housing register highlighted that those in the greatest need tend to be families with dependents and therefore the Council is generally focusing on delivery of 2, 3 and 4 bedroom houses for affordable housing. More tailored housing solutions may be needed for certain groups or locations, such as, extra care and supported accommodation for vulnerable households (covered in the next section).

Sovereign Housing Group (working with the Council, Community Council for Berkshire and Wargrave Parish Council) completed the Borough's first rural exception site in Wargrave in 2011. This project has been successful in delivering much-needed affordable housing for households with a local connection to the village of Wargrave, where house prices are some of the highest in the area. The Council hoped that the scheme would act as a catalyst for other parishes to engage with the rural housing project, but this has not proved to be the case. However, should other parishes express an interest through the neighbourhood planning route, the Council would still be keen to explore the opportunities for further rural housing schemes for local residents.

The Council is required by Government to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers alongside the settled population, and to provide a strategy that addresses any unmet need that is identified. The Council has therefore commissioned a refresh to the March 2013 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), which will provide the most up-to-date accommodation need figures for the Gypsy and Traveller community within the Borough. This will help to inform the development of a Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan (GTLP), which will build upon the Borough's existing planning policies in addressing their accommodation needs. The process has begun with the Draft Options for how future accommodation needs for Gypsies and Travellers will be met up to 2027 being consulted upon during the summer of 2014. The next stages of the plan-making process will include the identification of potentially suitable sites that could be allocated in order to meet the accommodation needs identified in the refreshed GTAA.

Many of the new affordable homes coming forward will be secured through the planning process on private developments (predominantly on the SDLs). However, the Council is playing an increasingly proactive role in enabling new homes to be developed throughout the Borough. To facilitate this, the Council is securing financial payments instead of on-site affordable housing on some private schemes to help fund affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough. This will allow the Council to bring forward a wider range of sites for affordable housing development, including regeneration projects, thus supporting sustainable communities.

In 2011, the Council established Wokingham Housing Limited (WHL), a wholly Council-owned Company and one of the first of its kind in the country, to deliver well-designed, high quality and sustainable housing. WHL has already completed its first development at Hillside Park in Shinfield – a development of 10 properties for clients with learning disabilities plus two retirement bungalows – and has attracted almost £2 million of Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) grant funding. Work is underway to establish Loddon Homes Ltd, a subsidiary of WHL, as a Registered Provider in order to maximise access to Government funding. Further schemes, including the regeneration of Eustace Crescent (now Phoenix Avenue) and the redevelopment of the former Fosters care home into modern extra care housing, are also due to start on site in 2015.

Wherever possible, we will work with our company, WHL, as the preferred developer of affordable housing in the Borough, particularly where it involves Council investment of land and/or funding. However, given the scale of our ambitions, there may be instances where the Council may look to others build our capacity – for example:

- The Council has a long-established and successful partnership with 4 housing associations (Registered Providers). This partnership delivers the majority of affordable housing secured through Section 106 agreements (i.e. the planning process) as part of private developments. The housing associations can often contribute resources to a scheme including land, funding, and specialist expertise and borrowing capacity.

- Tenant Services (the Housing Revenue Account, HRA) now own the Council's housing stock in the Borough, which opens up greater opportunity to look at regeneration and re-provision potential. As part of the self-financing deal with Government, the HRA does have access to some additional borrowing headroom as well as being able to use some of the receipts from "Right to Buy" to contribute to projects.

It is important that the Council maximises the opportunities created by the establishment of WHL, whilst capturing the resource benefits and enhanced capacity of working with a mixed economy of affordable housing providers on a case-by-case basis.

The Council has made significant steps forward with improving the standard of new build housing over the last year through the introduction of space and quality standards within the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan. Progress against these standards will be tracked through an annual survey of residents moving into new properties in the Borough. The Council also has an important role to play in ensuring that homes in the private sector are of a good quality, safe and secure.

Many local people on low incomes live in privately rented accommodation and the Council itself often assists households in housing need to access this form of housing. Between 2001 and 2011, Census data shows that the private rented sector in the Borough grew from 6.6% to 9%, and there is likely to be an expansion in the "Buy to Let" market as the large developments come forward over the next 10 years. However, there is limited regulation over the standards of property and management in this sector.

At the Council meeting on 24th July 2014, a motion was carried that "In order to address these issues and help local residents, this Council will continue to investigate cost effective ways of improving the help it offers local people on low incomes who are living in private rented accommodation." This could include re-establishing a landlord accreditation scheme, using discretionary licensing powers and/or updating the stock condition survey (to allow targeted action on the poorest quality housing in the Borough). These options will be reviewed over the next year and an action plan drawn up where required. The Council will also monitor other emerging issues in the private sector to assess if other interventions may be warranted – for example, advice and assistance to home owners if interest rates were to rise in the future.

In the next 3 years, we aim to:

- Complete 1,000 additional affordable homes through WHL, our housing association partners and private developers
- Help young people get on the housing ladder by expanding our intermediate housing offer to local residents, including completing our first self-build project
- Adopt a Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan (GTLP)
- Work with WHL to deliver new schemes across the Borough, including at Phoenix Avenue and the former Fosters site
- Review the support we offer low income households living in the private rented sector

3.2 Strategic Priority 2 - Supporting vulnerable people

Appropriate housing and support services play a crucial role in our preventative strategies to enable vulnerable people to live successfully in the community. People become vulnerable and require the assistance of others for a range of reasons, including poor parenting; mental health problems; learning difficulties; physical and sensory needs; reliance on drugs and/or alcohol, vulnerability due to age (either young or elderly); and domestic abuse. The Council aims to support vulnerable people through working in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies. The encouragement of self-reliance and independent living will positively contribute towards reducing the likelihood of vulnerable people living in institutional settings, which in turn will reduce the need for expensive care services and unnecessary admissions to hospital or residential care.

Wokingham Borough has an ageing population. Over the last ten years, there has been a sharp increase of 32.5% in the number of people aged over 65 in the Borough, compared to the national average of 10%. The growth in people aged over 65 living in Wokingham Borough is expected to continue to 2020 at a similar rate. In a survey of older residents, the majority (73%) stated that they wished to remain in their own home and a range of services are available to those who meet the Council's eligibility criteria to enable them to do this. We also offer a number of preventative services to people who do not meet the Council's eligibility criteria to help prevent their needs escalating. Nonetheless, due to circumstances and the level of support some people require, the Council has to find suitable, alternative accommodation for a number of people each year.

To address Wokingham's growing needs, the Council has worked hard to ensure there is an increased diversity of accommodation for older people in the Borough. Working with partners, the Council has already developed and delivered two Extra Care facilities:

- Alexandra Place – This award-winning Extra Care Housing Scheme in Woodley, developed by Catalyst Housing, provides 64 spacious apartments for older people with on-site care and facilities. The flats are available for social rent and shared ownership.
- Beeches Manor – This scheme in Wokingham, developed by Housing 21, consists of 18 ground floor apartments for older people with dementia with a further 8 first floor flats for clients with a learning disability.

Despite this progress, analysis of Wokingham's older people's population data indicates the requirement for between 300 and 500 additional units of specialist older people's housing to be built between 2014 and 2023. Many of these older people will be able to meet their own needs through private sector provision and we will continue to encourage the market to offer a range of suitable accommodation, particularly focused on Extra Care Housing. Further analysis shows the need for between 80 and 120 additional units for people who will require accommodation support from the local authority over the same period. To meet this need, we are commissioning two further Extra Care Housing schemes at Bulmershe Campus and on the former Foster's care home site, both in Woodley. Although we currently have an over-supply of care homes, the needs of our older population will be continuously

monitored to ensure that we offer the right number and types of accommodation to meet identified needs.

The Council's full plans for improving the housing offer for older people is contained in the Older People's Housing Strategy 2014-2019, which can be downloaded from:

[INSERT LINK] (link to be added when strategy publicly available on website)

At the other end of the age spectrum, the child population and number of children in care is also increasing and additional service capacity will be required to meet the needs of care leavers and other vulnerable young people. In particular, improved access to information, advice and guidance is vital in ensuring positive outcomes for the future and successful transition to independent living. Early help to prevent and respond to the needs of young people at risk of homelessness is crucial and actions identified to date to meet this objective include:

- Establishing a clear pathway for both care leavers and children on the edge of care to receive early housing advice and guidance;
- Closer partnership working, involving Targeted Youth Services and Family Support Services to provide support and guidance through existing arrangements to address the fundamental causes of homelessness;
- Better temporary housing arrangements that include the support necessary to help young people make the transition to secure, sustainable accommodation.

Both children in care and the residents of Seaford Court (our current supported accommodation scheme for young people) have indicated a need for an increased supply of supported housing and supported lodging options. These would provide both accommodation and a measure of support to help young people develop the skills and behaviours necessary to make a successful transition to independent adult life.

Whilst Seaford Court meets the needs of existing residents, the current eligibility criteria only extends to young people aged 16-25 years old with low to medium housing-related support needs. Analysis and consultation with young people has identified that this service should improve its outcomes for the most vulnerable young people in Wokingham. Overall analysis indicates a need for new supported accommodation with wider eligibility criteria.

Not all vulnerable young people will require supported accommodation. Therefore, as well as re-commissioning Seaford Court, we also need to increase the supply of smaller properties suitable for young people, with a focus on social rented properties.

The Council's Young People's Housing Strategy 2014-2019 can be downloaded from:

[INSERT LINK] (link to be added when strategy publicly available on website)

The Council has also been increasing the accommodation options for other vulnerable groups, including the recently completed Hillside Park development. This

scheme was the first development project undertaken by WHL and made good use of a redundant mobile home site. It provides 10 spacious apartments for clients with learning disabilities, as well as, 2 retirement bungalows. In the next 10 years, we expect the number of clients with learning disabilities requiring support from the Council to grow, particularly those with more complex needs (including early onset dementia). The Council aims to reduce the numbers going into residential care and replace this provision with more supported living and Extra Care Housing. Similarly, the Council is looking to commission new supported housing provision for clients with mental health issues and has £1.2 million allocated in the capital programme to achieve this.

As well as providing “bricks and mortar” options to vulnerable people, the Council also plans, commissions and inspects what is referred to as ‘housing-related support’ services locally. Housing-related support services focus specifically on enabling people to develop the skills required to secure or maintain their home with a strong emphasis on preventative activities, such as the Floating Support Service. The service is currently provided by Transform Housing and Support and is available to a range of client groups, including people with mental health problems, learning disabilities and physical disabilities, older people, ex-offenders and other vulnerable adults.

Wokingham Borough Council, Reading Borough Council and West Berkshire Council jointly commission Aster Living to provide a Home Improvement Agency for vulnerable people in the area. Services include undertaking small property adaptations, administering Disabled Facilities Grants and offering advice on financial assistance that residents can access.

In the next 3 years, we aim to:

- Complete at least 2 further Extra Care Housing schemes and seek to stimulate private sector provision of this type of accommodation for those that do not need the Council’s assistance
- Extend the housing options for vulnerable young people, including re-commissioning supported housing at Seaford Court
- Improve access to information, advice and guidance on housing, including establishing a clear pathway for both care leavers and children on the edge of care.
- Develop more supported housing for vulnerable people, including those with learning disabilities and mental health issues.
- Continue to provide a range of housing support services to help vulnerable people live independently.

3.3 Strategic Priority 3 – Tackling Homelessness and Housing Need

Economic prosperity, good health, successful education and safe and strong communities are all impacted by a lack of settled and decent housing. Homelessness is disruptive to peoples’ lives and causes insecurity and instability in our communities. Wokingham Borough Council places a strong emphasis on homelessness prevention where possible and appropriate, using creative solutions

and aims to provide more opportunities for Wokingham residents to access long-term sustainable homes. Homelessness can affect any one of us at any time. Factors such as debt, relationship breakdowns, physical or mental health issues, or leaving institutions such as the armed forces can set off a chain of events, which can sometimes spiral out of control and lead to homelessness. Early intervention in the form of good and accessible advice is essential.

In line with the national picture, we are now seeing far more of our residents who are struggling to sustain their homes in the Borough. For example, the number of households applying as homeless due to their landlord ending their assured shorthold tenancy is increasing. At the same time, changes to benefit legislation affecting tenants in the private rented sector have led to the pool of available properties shrinking. By providing a comprehensive housing options advice service, we ensure that those seeking housing assistance have access to as many choices as possible. Our Rent in Advance/Deposit Loan Scheme is critical in enabling people to access privately rented homes. We also take steps to help by negotiating directly with private landlords, supporting people in sustaining their tenancies and referring households to other services/agencies where needed. The Housing Needs Service have built excellent links with key stakeholders (such as, landlords, estate agents, the voluntary sector, Housing Benefit, etc.), which are crucial in finding early intervention solutions.

In December 2012, we launched the Accommodation Finder Scheme to assist vulnerable people to find privately rented accommodation. A key objective for the scheme was to build strong links with private sector landlords and agents. Initially 53 Letting Agents and 11 private landlords agreed to be part of the scheme and actively work to find accommodation for our customers. Our Accommodation Finder role has processes in place with Revenues and Benefits so that Housing Benefit applications for people using the scheme are “fast-tracked” and the landlord has a contact at the council who can assist if there are any problems during new tenancies. Changes to national legislation have impacted on our ability to sustain a developing role with private rented sector landlords and agencies. For example, the change to the way that the Local Housing Allowance local limits are calculated has meant that many private rented sector rents in our local area are now out of reach for those claiming benefits.

We are seeing an increase in the numbers of households becoming homeless and at the same time a decrease in the private rented sector options available. As understandably families want and need settled homes, the shrinking of the accessible private rented sector puts further pressure on social housing and the Housing Register

Households that do reach crisis point may be provided with temporary accommodation if they meet the strict homelessness criteria, whilst they wait for a settled home. Following a review of the temporary accommodation portfolio available within the Council's ownership in 2012, we recently completed redevelopment works to our central Wokingham temporary accommodation to provide mainly self-contained units. We also have plans to continue to replace and improve some of our mobile homes to provide higher quality, warmer temporary homes. Over the next year, we will undertake a review of nightly- paid (emergency) provision within the

Borough as we continue to find alternatives to out of Borough Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

In 2013, the council adopted a new Homelessness Strategy covering a five year period up to 2018. More information on the Homelessness Strategy, and the actions we are taking, can be found at:

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/council/decisions/policies/?assetdet6360345=8546&categoryesctl5148227=3762>

Underpinning all our work is the continuous assessment of housing need and supply. Working together across the council and with our Registered Providers, our aim is to provide a strategic approach to planning and delivering affordable housing to meet the needs of our residents now and in the future. In 2014, we introduced a new Allocations Policy which is designed to make the allocation of social housing more transparent and to make it easier for applicants to assess their prospects of being offered a tenancy of a council or housing association home. We will also continue to assess the feasibility of affordable housing products to ensure they are affordable for different household incomes.

In the next 3 years, we aim to:

- Continue to focus on the prevention of homelessness and find creative solutions to help our customers.
- Ensure that housing options and advice services remain accessible and relevant with the ability to intervene at an early stage with clear pathways for young people.
- Help people access private rented accommodation, through schemes such as the Rent in Advance/Deposit Loan Scheme and the Accommodation Finder Scheme.
- Continue to improve the temporary and emergency accommodation offer available.

3.4 Strategic Priority 4 – Enhancing Tenant Services

Tenant Services has undergone a significant transformation since the last Housing Strategy was adopted. As a stock retaining local authority, we were invited to purchase our Council housing from Central Government as part of the Localism Act 2011. From 2012, the complex system of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy was abolished resulting in local authority social landlords taking over responsibility for servicing the debt of their housing stock and retaining all of the rental income. Our debt settlement was £102 million. This has completely reformed the way we manage and plan future investment in our 2,621 council homes (correct in September 2014). It has resulted in a large increase in capital investment, benefitting tenants in the form of Decent Homes and improved services.

Prior to self-financing, the Council had struggled to meet its statutory responsibility to achieve the Government's Decent Homes standard, due to the lack of available investment and resources. In 2011, Tenant Services were successful in a bid for

over £5.2 million of Government funding for the decent homes backlog which arose under the subsidy system. The receipt of this funding and self-financing has allowed major investment in the stock for the first time in decades. The Council will ensure that all of our homes meet the Decent Homes standard by April 2015, and once this has been achieved there will be an ongoing need to maintain the entire stock at this standard. An Asset Management Strategy has been produced outlining how this will be achieved. In summary, priorities include:

- To have in place well designed repair and maintenance systems which ensure the stock is kept in a good state of repair.
- To develop a detailed knowledge and understanding of the financial and non-financial performance of the housing stock and to use this to inform future investment decisions.
- To ensure the ongoing availability of housing stock that meets the particular housing needs of elderly, vulnerable, disabled or minority households.
- To have a long term strategy and programme in place to substantially improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock, at the same time helping to reduce fuel poverty.
- To use procurement and contract management processes to best effect to ensure value for money.
- To address the particular challenges posed by the high percentage of non-traditional properties.

Like other local authorities, we have seen a significant reduction in stock due to Right to Buy. Between 1980 and 2014, almost one-third of Wokingham Borough Council homes (1,218 properties) were sold under the Right to Buy. Although take-up in recent years has been relatively low, the Government reinvigorated the Right to Buy scheme in 2012 by increasing the discount to £77,000. This has resulted in a further upturn in the number of applications and sales in the Borough, although they are still well below the levels experienced in the 1980s and 1990s.

However, the HRA reforms were accompanied by greater freedoms to local authorities over the disposal of assets and use of funds from disposals, including from Right to Buy sales. Tenant Services will therefore identify and consider the disposal of individual high value properties where doing so would remove liabilities and/or generate funds for future re-investment in properties, which are better located, better meet housing needs and are more efficient to manage. It will also explore potential opportunities for increasing the stock of properties available by acquiring properties, particularly if property types and location match housing need and management arrangements.

In addition, the Council has signed an agreement with Government to use its retained Right to Buy receipts to contribute towards either the purchase or development of new affordable homes. Any receipts have to be used within 3 years of sale or returned to Government. Whilst WHL will continue to be the Council's preferred developer, the proceeds from sales do open up opportunities for the HRA to also look at development, where appropriate. This will be important in ensuring the long-term viability of the Housing Revenue Account.

As discussed in Section 3.2, the Borough is experiencing a sharp increase in its elderly population. It is therefore unsurprising that Tenant Service's main demographic is households over 61 years of age. This ageing population is going to be a significant pressure on the service over the next 20 years and longer. Those of our tenants who occupy larger houses than they need but are unaffected by the social sector size criteria are the crux of an imbalance between available stock and demand. Whilst we wish to support people to stay in their homes as long as possible, this does not always result in the most effective use of our housing stock, particularly larger houses for young families. In future, we need to be more responsive and creative in terms of the housing offer we give to our tenants to encourage downsizing, whilst continuing to open up opportunities for our younger tenants.

We strive to offer our tenants and leaseholders a customer-focused service, where we listen and take on board their feedback and suggestions. We have seen customer satisfaction improving over the last 3 years – as an example, in the first quarter of 2014, Tenant Services received a record level of 50 compliments across all areas of the service, compared to just 26 complaints. We want this trend to continue.

The Council has embraced the principle of empowering tenants to take an active part in the management of their homes and has seen ever-increasing tenant and leaseholder participation. We will continue to develop our understanding of tenants', leaseholders', residents' and customers' needs and aspirations and actively engage them in decisions about their homes.

The introduction of the Localism Act 2011 marked a step change in housing policy. As well as self-financing, it has resulted in the emergence of welfare reforms (including benefit deductions), eligibility revisions, the introduction of fixed term tenancies and caps on income, which have started to impact on social housing. These are all challenges that we are seeking to address through an increased emphasis on tenancy sustainment within our Housing Management function.

We intend to introduce a new and improved tenancy agreement and tenant handbook, which take into account changes in working practices within the service and new legislation affecting social housing provision in England. For example, fixed term tenancies were introduced as part of the Localism Act 2011 and Wokingham Borough Council will be introducing them in 2015. The new handbook will outline the tenant and landlord responsibilities with regard to expected behaviours and repairs obligations.

We will continue to strive for greater efficiencies in service provision through innovation and achieving best practice. We will pursue greater social value in our activities, for example, by:

- Engaging local firms where we can and encouraging apprenticeships to support the local labour market and economy.
- Utilising sustainable development materials, techniques, principles and land use.

- Strengthening the skills base within the tenant body to enable those who can to become engaged in work, volunteering or training.

In the next 3 years, we aim to:

- Meet the Decent Homes Standard by April 2015 (not properties we have plans to dispose) and maintain the entire stock at this standard going forward, through the implementation of our Asset Management Strategy.
- Introduce new Tenancy agreements and Tenant handbook for existing and new tenants.
- Explore development, acquisition and disposal opportunities where appropriate with the aim of meeting housing needs and ensuring the viability of the HRA.
- Be more responsive and creative in the housing offer we give our older and younger tenants.
- Continue to empower our tenants and improve customer satisfaction.
- Strive for greater efficiencies in service provision through innovation and best practice.

3.5 Strategic Priority 5 - Expanding Opportunities

As well as helping to provide our residents with sustainable homes, the Council, together with our partners, has a vital role to play in improving people's life chances and reducing worklessness and a reliance on benefits. By investing in programmes and initiatives to help tenants and others in housing need, we can transform lives, as well as supporting the local economy and wider community.

Together with partners, the Council is actively looking at ways of improving job prospects for vulnerable groups, including young people. Education, training, employment and work experience are all more likely to succeed if a person has a settled home and similarly chances of finding a settled home are enhanced by the opportunities brought about by education and training. For example, the recently launched 'Elevate Wokingham' hub based in Wokingham Library provides a one-stop shop for 16 – 24 year olds in the borough to get help, advice and support on employment, training, work experience, volunteering and mentoring. The project is part of the Thames Valley Berkshire City Deal, which aims to bring together a number of co-located employment services (such as Adviza and Optalis) as well as providing a brokerage scheme for apprenticeships within the local construction industry. The Council intends to introduce a dedicated housing adviser for young people, who can work alongside these agencies, to join up housing and careers advice services.

In early 2014, a pilot programme was run as part of the Council's drive to help those who are unemployed or on a low income develop the skills to set up their own business. The course was primarily aimed at social housing tenants and was jointly funded and organised by the Council and its partners, including Housing Solutions, Catalyst Gateway, Sovereign Housing and Bracknell Forest Homes. The 12-week Strive course was run by Enterprise Cube, a social enterprise company specialising in interactive learning and practical support for business set up, and included topics such as finance and marketing. The pilot was very successful and the majority of

graduates have now formed flourishing new businesses, ranging from gardening services, cleaning services and child care to bespoke home furnishing, business services, a market food stall and an online princess portal to provide virtual princesses for children's parties or presents. We plan to run another Strive course during 2015 and in future years (subject to funding).

As well as helping households to access employment and to start up their own businesses, the Council is keen to work with partners to assist residents make their money go further. In April 2014, Transform's Wokingham Floating Support team, in partnership with the Council and many other local organisations, organised a 'Live Well and Spend Less' community event attended by over 70 people. The event included presentations from guest speakers, with topics including budgeting, saving energy, eating well and preventing food waste. Attendees were also able to meet with representatives from 21 local organisations to find out more about the help on offer, including Citizens Advice Bureau, Healthwatch and Wokingham Foodbank. The team received very good feedback from attendees, with 100% of people rating the event as good or very good and 92% saying they would attend a similar event in future.

Through a joint scheme with Age Concern Slough and East Berkshire (partially funded by the Council), unwanted furniture is recycled and sold on for charity. The scheme collects unwanted furniture that is in a reasonable condition from homes and businesses around the Borough. The furniture is stored at a new Furniture and Electrical Depot in Wharfdale Road, IQ Winnersh and is available to anyone to buy at reasonable prices. The project brings many benefits to the community. It is environmentally-friendly, as some of the recycled furniture would otherwise have ended up in landfill; it provides reasonably priced furniture to all customers and discounted furniture to those who really need it.

The 'warm and well' scheme aims to provide information and advice, as well as practical support to help older and disabled people in the Borough during cold weather. Thousands of 'warm and well' leaflets, with information about local and national sources of help and support ranging from handyman services through to information on how to keep warm and stay fit and well during cold weather. As well as the leaflets, winter emergency packs containing items such as blankets, thermal socks, thermal mugs and hot water bottles have been distributed to elderly and disabled people who find it difficult to keep warm in the winter.

In the next 3 years, we aim to:

- Continue to expand employment and training opportunities through new developments and our provider services
- Offer a joined-up housing and employment advice service for young people at "Elevate Wokingham"
- Run more Strive courses to help residents establish new businesses
- Examine funding opportunities to continue preventative projects, such as, the 'warm and well' scheme.

5. *Monitoring and Evaluation*

Progress against the Housing Strategy will be monitored by the Housing Delivery Partnership Group, which in turn feeds into the Health and Wellbeing Board (through the Place and Community Partnership). The Housing Delivery Partnership Group meets 3-4 times a year and is currently chaired by the Development Director of a partner Registered Provider (RP). The group includes tenant representatives and external partners, including RPs, support providers, Newbury Building Society and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The group receives updates on delivery against the action plan and oversees the development of the strategy.

An action plan will be developed with key partners over the next 2-3 months to ensure the objectives set out in this draft strategy can be delivered. The action plan is intended as a working document which will be subject to continuous review to ensure that it remains responsive, appropriate and up-to-date.

Contact Details

Area	Contact	Details
Housing - Assets, Tenant Services, Leaseholder Involvement	Simon Price Head of Housing	Tel: 0118 9743775 Email: simon.price@wokingham.gov.uk
Housing Needs, Homelessness, Housing Advice	Jude Whyte Housing Needs Manager	Tel: 0118 9746755 Email: jude.whyte@wokingham.gov.uk
Affordable Housing, Registered Provider Partnership, Housing Strategy, Rural Housing, Homelessness Strategy	Louise Strongitharm Policy Manager (Economic Sustainability)	Tel: 0118 9746779 Email: louise.strongitharm@wokingham.gov.uk
	Frances Haywood Senior Strategy Officer (Economic Sustainability)	Tel: 0118 9746859 Email: frances.haywood@wokingham.gov.uk

Appendix 1- Action Plan

Actions					
Addressing our Housing Needs					
No.	Activity	Commitments	Outcomes	Impacts	Lead Organisations
1.1	Help to address our housing needs by delivering more affordable homes in the borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete 1000 additional affordable homes over the next three years (2015 – 2018) 	A range of high quality affordable housing across the borough to meet housing needs, including new and innovative tenures	Demand consistently outstrips the supply of affordable housing. More affordable housing is needed to help people access a settled home	Economic Sustainability Team Wokingham RP Partnership
1.2	Help to address our housing needs by delivering more affordable homes in the borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore opportunities for rural housing schemes in the Borough 	A range of high quality affordable housing across the borough to meet housing needs, including new and innovative tenures	Demand consistently outstrips the supply of affordable housing. More affordable housing is needed to help people access a settled home	Economic Sustainability Team Wokingham RP Partnership
1.3	Encourage new tenures and housing options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage more intermediate rented properties to help lower income households Encourage new tenures and options for younger people Complete a self build project with residents in housing need by 2018 	More housing options for lower income groups Enable those in housing need the opportunity to get onto the housing ladder	Meet the housing needs of lower income groups and consider the development of creative tenures to help expand access to the private rented sector Enable participants of the self build project the opportunity to develop new	Head of Housing Economic Sustainability Team

				construction skills	
1.4	Address the accommodation needs of our gypsy and traveller community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refresh the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and adopt a Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan by 2017/18 	Address unmet need and identify potentially suitable sites	Help to meet the accommodation needs of the GRT community	Land Use and Transport Team West Berkshire and Wokingham Environmental Health and Licensing
1.5	Assess housing opportunities through Wokingham Housing Limited (our preferred affordable housing developer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery of Eustace Crescent regeneration scheme and redevelopment of Fosters Care Home by 2015 Programme of development of smaller infill sites 	More affordable homes delivered in the borough to meet our housing needs	Opportunities for developing land and funding for housing is maximised	Head of Housing Economic Sustainability Team
1.6	Review the support we offer low income households living in the private rented sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake an options appraisal and action plan to assess: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of a landlord accreditation scheme Discretionary licensing powers Updated stock condition survey Continue to monitor emerging issues in the private rented sector to assess if interventions are needed 	Improve the help we offer local people on low incomes who are living in the private rented sector	Able to respond to emerging issues within the Private Rented Sector and provide effective support and advice to those affected	Head of Housing Economic Sustainability Team
Supporting Vulnerable People					
No.	Activity	Commitments	Outcomes	Impacts	Lead Organisations
2.1	Help to address Wokingham's ageing population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete at least 2 further Extra Care Housing schemes and seek to stimulate private sector provision Continue to monitor to ensure we offer the right number and types of accommodation to meet identified needs 	Help meet the needs of the older population in Wokingham by ensuring we offer the right number and types of accommodation	Increased diversity of accommodation for Older People in the Borough Reduce the numbers of older people going into residential care	Strategic Commissioning Team Adult Social Care
	Meet the housing needs of vulnerable young people including children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the potential for new supported accommodation within the Borough 	Help young people develop the skills and behaviours necessary to	Provision of supported housing will meet the needs	Strategic Commissioning Team Children's Services

2.2	in care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-commission supported housing at Seaford Court • Develop better temporary housing arrangements for vulnerable young people that include support 	make a successful transition to independent adult life	of vulnerable young people	
2.3	Meet the housing needs of vulnerable young people including children in care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to information, advice and guidance on housing by establishing a clear pathway for both care leavers and children on the edge of care • Increase the supply of smaller properties for young people • Offer a joined-up housing and employment service for young people at Elevate Wokingham 	Help young people develop the skills and behaviours necessary to make a successful transition to independent adult life	Provision of information, advice and guidance will help meet the needs of vulnerable young people	Strategic Commissioning Team Children's Services
2.4	Provide more housing support for vulnerable people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop more supported housing for vulnerable people, including those with learning disabilities and mental health issues • Continue to provide a range of housing support services to help vulnerable people live independently 	Enable people to develop the skills required to secure or maintain their home with a strong emphasis on preventative activities	Increased diversity of accommodation for vulnerable groups and reduce the numbers of vulnerable people going into residential care	Strategic Commissioning Team Adult Social Care West Berkshire and Wokingham Home Improvement Agency
Tackling Homelessness and Housing Need					
No.	Activity	Commitments	Outcomes	Impacts	Lead Organisations
3.1	Continue to focus on the prevention of homelessness and find creative solutions to help our customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide face-to-face advice services for homeless people during full council opening hours (42.5 hours per week) • Provide a direct housing advice service at council facilities for at least 32.5 hours per week 	<p>In any year, the numbers of cases where homelessness is prevented is higher than where homelessness is unavoidable</p> <p>The number of residents</p>	Prevention of homelessness will minimise the disruption to people's lives, including the wider impact of quality of life and life chances	Housing Needs Citizens Advice Bureau

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAB to run County Court advice desk available to residents facing possession action Work with partners to help identify areas of need/hotspots within the Borough (e.g., fuel poverty, food poverty, etc) and take pro-active measures to help address these issues 	facing possession action is reduced through support provided by organisations such as CAB		
3.2	Ensure that housing options and advice services remain accessible and relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run a Housing Register based on need Ensure that we consult with a wide range of users, including young people, in exploring and developing different housing options Set up a panel of mystery shoppers, including young people, to help identify where housing services can be improved 	Social housing vacancies let efficiently (within 28 days of property becoming empty)	A fair and transparent lawful letting system that responds to need ensures a path to social housing that is understandable and meets needs as closely as possible	Housing Needs
3.3	Help more people access private rented accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an Accommodation Finder Scheme within the Housing Needs Service Provide a Rent in Advance/Deposit Loan Scheme via the Housing Needs Service in Housing Needs 	Use the Accommodation Finder Scheme to help households to find a decent settled home Assist 60 households per annum with a Rent in Advance/Deposit Loan	Without this intense help many more vulnerable people would struggle with being able to find a home of their own. Privately rented accommodation can be out of reach if financial help is not available.	Housing Needs
3.4	Continue to improve the temporary and emergency accommodation offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide good quality local accommodation (wherever possible for those with a local connection to Wokingham Borough 	Provision of alternative nightly paid accommodation (instead of traditional B&Bs) Expansion of family sized	Moving to temporary accommodation can be disruptive and daunting for families improving provision	Housing Needs Tenant Services Wokingham Housing Limited

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the temporary accommodation portfolio available within Wokingham Borough Council ownership and implement plans to improve the offer 	temporary accommodation portfolio	will impact positively on opportunities to thrive and be settled	
Enhancing Tenant Services					
No.	Activity	Commitments	Outcomes	Impacts	Lead Organisations
4.1	Meet the Decent Homes Standard by April 2015 and maintain the entire stock at this standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of the Asset Management Strategy Repair and maintenance systems in place Develop a detailed knowledge and understanding of the financial and non-financial performance of the housing stock and use this to inform future investment decisions 	Meet the Decent Homes Standard and ensure that all stock is maintained at this standard	Well maintained, efficient housing stock	Head of Housing Tenant Services
4.2	Continue to empower our tenants and improve customer satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively engage tenants in decisions about their homes Introduce new Tenancy agreements and Tenant handbook for tenants 	Written documentation of expected behaviours and repair obligations Increased customer satisfaction amongst tenants	Well informed and empowered tenants	Head of Housing Tenant Services
4.3	Explore opportunities for increasing the stock of properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore development, acquisition and disposal opportunities 	Remove liabilities and generate funds for future reinvestment in properties	Better located, more efficient housing stock	Head of Housing Tenant Services
4.4	Be more responsive and creative in our housing offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage downsizing Continue to open up opportunities for younger tenants 	Address balances between available stock and demand	Help to address the needs of older and younger tenants	Head of Housing Tenant Services
4.6	Strive for greater efficiencies in service provision through innovation and best practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage local firms and encourage apprenticeships to support the local labour market and economy Utilise sustainable development materials, techniques, principles and land use Strengthening the skills base within the tenant body to enable 	Greater efficiencies in service provision through innovation and achieving best practice	Greater social value in activities	Head of Housing Tenant Services

		those who can to become engaged in work, volunteering or training			
Expanding Opportunities					
No.	Activity	Commitments	Outcomes	Impacts	Lead Organisations
5.1	Continue to expand employment and training opportunities for vulnerable groups including young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt an Employment and Skills Supplementary Planning Document to secure training and employment opportunities from new developments • Work with housing providers to create more employment and training opportunities for tenants including running more business enterprise programmes to help residents establish new businesses • Offer a joined-up housing and employment advice service for young people at Elevate Wokingham 	<p>More jobs and apprenticeship opportunities are created in the Borough</p> <p>A better understanding and shared commitment to improving outcomes and opportunities for households in need</p>	<p>Employment and training opportunities will help people access work and improve their circumstances (including housing)</p> <p>The disruption that housing need causes to people's lives can be minimised by ensuring a joined-up approach to understanding and tackling the root causes</p>	Economic Sustainability Team
5.2	Explore funding opportunities for preventative projects and awareness raising events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify funding opportunities to deliver projects to those who are homeless or vulnerable during the cold winter months, such as the 'warm and well' scheme • Raise awareness with energy companies to create pro-active measures to help more people in need • Increase membership of the credit union 	<p>Help to enable residents who are elderly, have disabilities or long term illnesses to stay safe and well during the cold weather and help to prevent alternatives to payday lenders</p>	<p>Preventative schemes will help to address the impact from issues such as fuel poverty and improve the lives of vulnerable residents</p>	Economic Sustainability Team

Appendix 2 - Housing Strategy Consultation Analysis

In November 2014 we ran a consultation on the Draft Housing Strategy 2015-2018. A total of 18 responses were received, of which 15 were from residents of the Borough. There were also responses from a Member of the Council, a member of staff of the Council and the Wokingham Learning Disability Partnership Board (LDBP).

The survey asked a variety of questions in order to ascertain the following; whether there was agreement with the objectives set out in the strategy, whether there was anything to add to the objectives, whether the purpose of the document was clear, what challenges the Borough is facing, the desired outcomes of the strategy, what the most effective methods to achieve these outcomes may be and whether the approach taken in the strategy was the right one.

The information below contains a summary of the responses received for how strongly the respondents agreed or disagreed with the objectives set out in the strategy:

- 1) **Addressing our housing needs:** 35.2% either strongly agreed or agreed with this objective.
- 2) **Supporting vulnerable people:** 56.3% either strongly agreed or agreed with this objective.
- 3) **Tackling homelessness and housing need:** 47% either strongly agreed or agreed with this objective.
- 4) **Enhance tenant services:** 40.11% either strongly agreed or agreed with this objective.
- 5) **Expand opportunities:** 41.2% either strongly agreed or agreed with this objective.

Feedback on any additions to the objectives:

Feedback from the Consultation	WBC Response
More partnership working with groups such as the Learning Disability Partnership Board (LDPB) sub-group who have guidance that can be shared, for example an easy read Housing Guide for people with learning difficulties. Also, Wokingham Unity Charities who provide accommodation for vulnerable older people.	Joined up partnership working is a key component for delivery of a successful strategy. Our partnership work ensures that there is increased awareness of each other's work and shared understanding of problems and possible solutions. Moving forward we will be working more closely with partners through forums such as the Wokingham Housing Delivery Group to deliver the strategic objectives outlined in this strategy.
More focus and information in Strategic Priority 2 about addressing the housing needs of the other vulnerable people, as 'Older People' and 'Young People' already have their own housing strategy.	The Housing Strategy is intended to be an overarching "umbrella" strategy into which other strategies such as the Older People's Housing Strategy and Young People's Housing Strategy will feed into. Delivery of these strategies forms a key part of this strategy. In order to keep the Housing Strategy focused and concise it was felt that the other strategies would contain further information about how we are

	addressing the housing needs of vulnerable groups.
Greater consideration of school planning to go alongside the development of housing in the Borough.	Consideration of school places is a key component with the planning of any new development. Both the Primary School Strategy 2012 – 16 and the Secondary School Strategy 2012 – 16 take this into account.
Need to mention how green space will be protected when there is increasing development.	Consideration of green space forms a key part of development planning, this can be through conservation of existing green space or through provision of alternative green space. The Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities Strategy also provides guidance on the approach taken for open space, sport and recreational facilities in residential development.
Greater consideration of the infrastructure improvements required to support the development of housing in the Borough.	Consideration of infrastructure forms a key part of development planning. The Infrastructure Delivery Supplementary Planning Document aims to deliver a viable infrastructure rich solution to support new developments.
More information should be provided in the document about Wokingham Housing Limited; what they do and what are their limitations for example.	Information on Wokingham Housing Limited (WHL) is contained within section 3.1 of this strategy.

There were mixed views from respondents as to whether they felt that the document was clear. Some felt that the purpose of the document was clear; however others commented that they found the wording to be confusing in places. Some felt that the strategy does not provide enough detail and does not consider the balance between housing, infrastructure and conservation.

When asked what challenges the Borough is facing in terms of housing, responses included:

- Pressures on land and open space from development
- Getting enough houses built
- Congestion as a result of over-development especially in Wokingham
- Lack of school provision and the fact that housing provision must be done in tandem with providing more school provision. E.g., Twyford has been a tragic consequence of poor school provision after years of over development
- Lack of affordable housing/social housing especially for first time buyers.
- Finding/providing sufficient housing to supply the increasing demands for social housing and private rented accommodation at affordable prices
- Issues around the 'affordability' of affordable housing, i.e., 80% of market rents in Wokingham does not make them affordable
- Taking financial payments instead of on-site affordable housing which may lead to the concentration of social housing in other locations.
- Rising house prices

- Providing housing for the ageing population, also for older people with learning disabilities
- Finding suitable housing for vulnerable people – both in terms of accessibility and affordability
- Finding private landlords who will accept tenants who are in receipt of Housing Benefit
- Transport links in places like Woodley that have more affordable housing. This can prevent vulnerable people from living independently
- Concerns that there is too much housing being built in the Borough
- Pressure to build larger houses for a greater profit, when the demand is for smaller properties that people such as 'key workers' are often unable to afford
- Poorly designed and constructed developments
- The challenge of over population of this area. Successive Governments have failed to address the problem and have passed on the problem.

Some of these issues will be addressed through the development of more affordable housing (including supported and Extra Care and other housing options for vulnerable people), focussing on preventative methods to tackle homelessness, continuing to improve the council's social housing stock, and helping to provide more opportunities for our residents to help tackle issues such as employment and the reduction of poverty.

The fundamental outcomes that those responding to the consultation wanted to see were:

- The Council addressing the challenges that are preventing people from accessing suitable housing
- An increased consideration of the infrastructure required to support development
- A reasonable amount of social housing that acts as a stepping-stone towards full/partial home ownership
- Improved response times for tenants
- Security of long term tenure for both social and private rented clients
- Less new-build housing
- A reduction in house prices – house prices to fall or at least stay stable
- Schools and other infrastructure to be delivered at the same time as housing
- More affordable housing with gardens
- More creative solutions for housing and 'future proofing' – the delivery of housing options that can be adapted as resident's needs change
- The introduction of planning conditions to build homes for key workers as well as the most vulnerable in society
- Shorter lead in times for people requiring social housing, with security of tenure for both social and private rental tenants
- A greater consideration for the environment, as well as an intention to maintain the 'market town' feel of the town centre
- A shift to promoting strong communities including reducing the need for car ownership and providing low cost housing

In terms of the approach taken to the Housing Strategy, 35.3% either strongly agreed or agreed that is right, 23.5% neither agreed nor disagreed and 41.1% either strongly disagreed or disagreed. Those that disagreed with the strategy felt that more residential development in the area was not appropriate and had concerns about the balance of infrastructure, housing and loss of green space.

Stakeholders felt that the most effective methods for tackling housing issues include:

- The Council working in partnership with private landlords to address concerns about accepting tenants who receive housing benefit
- Review the transport links in places like Woodley
- Having infrastructure in place before housing, as well as a greater focus on infrastructure such as schools
- The use of housing associations to provide part-ownership properties
- Ensuring that more starter homes are built and brown field sites are used for affordable housing
- The provision of more affordable homes
- Build more development near transport hubs
- Greater promotion of down-sizing through options such as 'Ethical Equity Release'.
- Reducing the number of developers who pay contributions rather than providing affordable housing. The Council should make a decision about where affordable housing should sit – HRA should do everything not subject to Right to Buy, WHL everything that is, Loddon Homes should only be used where it can gain access to funding not available to the council
- Move development further away from the centre of town in order to disperse traffic
- Reduce the number of houses being built
- A clear statement of objectives in all Council publications
- Re-prioritising where housing should go

Other comments made:

- It would be good for local people to be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the Housing Strategy
- It would be good to have an 'easy-read' version of the strategy to make it more accessible to vulnerable groups
- It is really positive that the Council plan to improve access to information, advice and guidance on housing
- The Accommodation Finder Scheme is a really valuable and useful service that should be promoted and expanded upon
- There is a need to strengthen the section on the expansion of opportunities
- There should be a promotion of the development of unused space above retail premises for low cost accommodation
- Question raised as to why a by-pass is not being built in Wokingham to support housing developments
- It should not just be about meeting targets, but around helping people who need it, so entitlement must be reviewed frequently
- This document presents an opportunity to be ambitious and optimistic, rather than reproducing 'much of the same'
- The Council should consider 'campus-style' accommodation for young home leavers/graduates to allow them to save for a deposit
- So far, development has too much of a local view, it should be tied into a regional, inter-linking plan
- Some of the work under 'Expanding Opportunities' seems trivial and it is hard to determine what some of the outcomes of this work might be
- There is a need to address the issue that whilst more houses are continuing to be built, those that have been built are struggling to be sold

- The Strategy does not explain why there is a need for this much new development in the area
- Better transport links to transport hubs such as Reading station. More housing will increase congestion so new local links need to be tied to a regional interlinking plan