



West Somerset Housing Strategy

2009 to 2012



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ACRONYMS USED

CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment
CLG	Communities and Local Government
DFG	Disable Facilities Grant
IDeA	Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government
HCA	Homes and Communities Agency
HIA	Home Improvement Agency
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LDF	Local Development Framework
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NPHMA	Northern Peninsula Housing Market Assessment
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SCHIP	Somerset Coast Home Improvement Agency
SCS	Sustainable Community Strategy
SHMA	Strategic Housing Market Assessment
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SMART	Specific, measurable, agreed, realistic, time based
SSCS	Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy
SSHOG	Somerset Strategic Housing Officer Group
WSC	West Somerset Council
WSCS	West Somerset Community Strategy
WSSP	West Somerset Strategic Partnership

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Housing Strategy sets the direction and priorities for housing services in West Somerset. The Strategy is the result of an extensive consultation process and it draws on a wide range of evidence. A long term view is taken although the action plan is limited to the next three years and particularly actions that form the most immediate priorities. The Strategy covers action to be taken by West Somerset Council and by a wide range of housing partners.

HOW THE HOUSING STRATEGY IS ORGANISED

The main document consists of three sections:

1. The Housing Vision
2. The Housing Strategy
3. The Action Plan

Accompanying appendices detail:

- Relevant consultation
- The evidence base
- Contextual information from national down to local level
- Links between the Housing Strategy, Sustainable Community Strategies at District and County level, and the Local Area Agreement, and
- Implementation of the Audit Commission recommendations following the inspection of Strategic Housing Services

THE HOUSING VISION

The first section of the document describes the key challenges in West Somerset and how the Sustainable Community Strategy is addressing these challenges. In addition to the immediate concerns related to economic recession, there are three key, long term, characteristics that are driving the agenda for West Somerset.

- Connectivity
- Economy

- Demographics

These characteristics are reflected in the aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy and housing services contribute to each of these aims. The components of the vision within the Sustainable Community Strategy, as they relate to housing services, are:

OUR ECONOMIC VISION: A PROSPEROUS WEST SOMERSET

West Somerset has a low wage economy dominated by tourism, agriculture and, increasingly, care services. Butlins is by far the largest employer in Minehead. The nature of housing in an area has implications for the wider economy and the ambitions for the area. The right housing, including affordable housing, is essential to attract and retain a skills base that will encourage inward investment. The issues that link housing with the economy in West Somerset are about ensuring a supply of affordable housing so that working age people are not forced to leave the area: and about addressing worklessness amongst those who are resident.

OUR SOCIAL VISION: A WELCOMING STRONG AND BALANCED COMMUNITY

There are hidden costs to living in a rural area including second homes, high house prices and low paid work. Like many areas, West Somerset has poor transport infrastructure which makes it more difficult to attract inward investment. Rural villages need working people, housing development, jobs and services to keep rural communities alive. The issue in rural areas is not just about building in the most sustainable parts, but about considering what is needed to keep existing settlements sustainable. Access to affordable housing is a major concern across the district and particularly so in the Exmoor National Park.

There has been an increase in claimants of Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disablement Allowance in Minehead and there are some issues related to substance and alcohol abuse, mental health problems and low level crime and anti-social behavior. The Housing Strategy is concerned with the accessibility and quality of housing and support services and providing advice on the options available.

Vulnerable people, including migrant workers, often live in the private rented sector and encouraging good standards of management and accommodation in this sector is another concern of the Housing Strategy.

The proportion of older people in West Somerset is one of, if not the, highest in the country. Very large increases in the number of older people, including frail older people with support needs are expected over the next 20 years. The existing housing stock has not, for the most part, been designed with the needs of older people in mind. The rural nature of the area, affordability issues, off gas areas, poor quality of some of the housing stock, and dwellings without level access all pose particular challenges.

OUR ENVIRONMENTAL VISION: AN INCREASINGLY SELF SUFFICIENT WEST SOMERSET

The combination of low wages and high house prices means that the affordability of housing in West Somerset is some of the worst in the country. Past delivery of new affordable homes has been minimal and recent increases in provision need to be maintained and accelerated to make inroads in meeting housing need. There is a need to increase the availability of good quality affordable housing both from new provision and from the existing stock; and to minimize further demand through action to prevent homelessness. It isn't just the number of affordable homes that is important, but also the provision of the right type of housing in the right locations and the right housing support services.

High environmental and sustainability standards are clear priorities for both the district and the county Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). This consistency is also carried through into this Housing Strategy. Further synergy is created by the opportunities for economic growth offered by 'green collar' jobs. New residential buildings are much more energy efficient than old ones, but the replacement rate is very low. West Somerset is particularly prone to fuel poverty and many of the properties themselves are hard to treat. There is a large number of listed properties that do not lend themselves to being easily insulated, and high numbers of properties are second homes or are in the private rented sector with little incentive to improve the properties thermal efficiency.

The Housing Strategy has two over-arching objectives:

- To meet the housing needs of West Somerset's dispersed rural population and coastal and market towns
- To develop a mix of housing that supports regeneration and economic growth opportunities.

THE HOUSING STRATEGY

The Housing Strategy is organised around three themes:

- People
 - Priority 1: Address the housing needs of an ageing population
 - Priority 2: Tackle worklessness and address other social investment priorities
 - Priority 3: Prevent and deal with homelessness and address other housing support priorities

- Future housing development and increasing the availability of affordable housing
 - Priority 4: Provide the framework for future housing provision
 - Priority 5: Increase the provision of new affordable housing
 - Priority 6: Make best use of existing housing stock
- Promoting good housing conditions and energy efficient homes
 - Priority 7: Encourage good quality accommodation and management
 - Priority 8: Promote energy efficient homes

A final priority is concerned with the processes and structures to deliver outcomes:

- Continue to drive forward performance improvement

ACTION PLAN

A detailed action plan is included with the full Housing Strategy Document. Key activities include:

- Further developing the strategic approach to older people's housing, including identifying priority areas for the provision of extra care housing, investigating the potential of telecare services, and further developing the advice and information available on housing options
- Carrying out further work in relation to worklessness, including a feasibility study for a foyer and using a specialist toolkit to establish priorities for social investment. Actions will also be taken to ensure a coordinated approach to financial inclusion and consistency in advice given by different housing services
- Following recent completion of a Sub Regional Homelessness Strategy, actions will be taken forward in conjunction with the other Somerset districts. These include exploring the potential for private sector leasing as permanent accommodation, improving existing and developing new protocols
- Options will be considered for the management of the Gypsy and Traveller site at Stogursey
- Progress is continuing to be made towards the Local Development Framework. Future work will look at sustainability through the clustering of rural settlements and identifying priority areas for new development. A masterplan will be prepared for the regeneration of Minehead

- Opportunities for grant funding for new affordable housing will continue to be vigorously pursued. New Supplementary Guidance relating to affordable housing will be developed and innovative solutions to providing affordable housing in the National Park will be sought
- An empty homes officer will be appointed, will lead on identifying priorities and the most appropriate tools to deal with empty homes, and will instigate action to bring empty properties back into use
- The final stages will be completed in drawing together private sector housing services across West Somerset and Sedgemoor. A firm strategic and policy framework will be established including the development of a Home Maintenance Strategy. A landlord accreditation system will be introduced and choice based lettings will be rolled out to private landlords
- A new post is being created to address fuel poverty. Strategic targeting will be enhanced through the use of GIS to map fuel poverty indicators and an energy efficiency campaign will be carried out
- Following completion of the Housing Strategy detailed service delivery plans will be prepared. Progress in delivery the Strategy will be monitored regularly and a performance management pilot for Strategic Housing Services will be completed in conjunction with IDeA
- Proposals will be worked up to create joint housing services across Somerset and begin the process of amalgamating service delivery

The Housing Strategy will be a success in the long term if:

- Our rural settlements and market and coastal towns are sustainable
- Minehead is a vibrant economic centre and has a balanced community
- Vulnerable people are able to access integrated support services to secure and maintain housing and where possible employment and training
- The prevalence of alcohol, substance abuse and mental health issues and problems do not become entrenched
- Comprehensive information is available for older people on a wide range of housing and support options including information relating to care and support services and adaptations to allow people to remain in their homes and other housing options. This information includes that related to the financial

implications of various options and the grants, benefits and loans that can be accessed

- A wide range of housing and support is available to meet the housing needs of older people
- There is an adequate supply of affordable housing of the right type to meet identified needs
- Minimal numbers of people are presenting as and being found to be homeless
- There is a decrease in the number of homes that fail to meet the decent homes standard especially amongst those occupied by vulnerable people
- There is an increase in the energy efficiency rating of homes, especially those occupied by vulnerable people
- A diverse range of good quality, well managed housing stock is available for private renting, with an increased amount available at affordable rents
- There is a coherent, well managed and customer focused approach to housing service delivery. There is integrated and coordinated activity aimed at achieving shared priorities in the most cost effective way. Clear structures, processes and accountability, with performance and risk management are embedded.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

- Rapidly rising house prices and a low wage economy have combined to make West Somerset one of the most unaffordable places in the country
- The credit crunch, far from easing the housing situation, by lowering house prices, has made it even more difficult to get a mortgage to access the housing market
- The downturn in the economy is seeing more people get into difficulty with their housing costs
- The older than average population profile, the rural nature of the district, and the type of dwellings, all bring additional challenges to housing services, particularly concerning the ability to afford to adequately heat and insulate dwellings

These are just a few of the challenges facing West Somerset.

This is a Housing Strategy for the West Somerset – the Council, its partners and its residents. It sets out how West Somerset Council (WSC) and a range of agencies delivering housing services will co-ordinate their efforts and resources to best meet the housing challenges faced in West Somerset. It is intended to be delivered by the full range of partners collectively working to achieve an ambitious long-term vision.

The local authority strategic housing role covers a wide range of issues. These include community cohesion, green issues, homelessness, decent homes standards, health and safety ratings, supporting people and housing market issues. It covers all types of housing – new and existing, owner occupied, privately rented and affordable housing.

The local authority is expected to give a positive lead but is increasingly reliant on partners to deliver.

1.1 INVOLVEMENT OF RESIDENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN DEVELOPING THE HOUSING STRATEGY

This Housing Strategy takes account of recent consultation events and their bearing on housing services. These include the consultation process for the West Somerset Community Strategy (WSCS); consultation carried out as part of the development of Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs); and recent events held with specific client groups, such as older people, migrant workers and those with disabilities. In addition bespoke consultation exercises have been carried out with the specific purpose of informing the development of the Housing Strategy. These have included sessions with a wide range of council officers and partner

stakeholders, District Councillors, Parish Councillors and residents of West Somerset. A detailed summary of the consultation process and the views expressed is contained in Appendix 1.

1.2 MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION

In line with other strategic documents, the Housing Strategy looks to the future over twenty years or more. However the action plan, sets out actions for the next three years and with the greatest focus being on specific actions to be carried out over the next 12 months. There is a SMART action plan, with identified leads for each action. Further detailed actions flowing from the action plan will be built into relevant service plans and partnership work programmes.

The core housing function of local authorities is now enabling and strategic rather than direct provision. The strategic housing role is made up of the “strategic decisions and activities associated with effective planning and delivery to meet the needs of all residents across all tenures”¹. The delivery of the strategic housing role relies heavily on joint working with partners. The delivery of the Strategy will be steered and monitored by the Strategic Housing Authority, WSC. There are linkages to the district and county level Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), including relevant LAA targets. The action plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis via the West Somerset Strategic Housing Forum that reports to the LSP. It will remain responsive to changing circumstances and if appropriate additions or changes will be made. The action plan will also be fully refreshed on an annual basis. Further information relating to how the Strategy will be delivered is contained in Chapter 7.

¹ The Housing Green Paper, Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable

SECTION 1 THE HOUSING VISION

The Housing Strategy has two over-arching objectives:

- To meet the housing needs of West Somerset's dispersed rural population and coastal and market towns
- To develop a mix of housing that supports regeneration and economic growth opportunities.

This section explains how the vision for housing has been derived. It draws heavily on information contained in the first three appendices that explain the context and evidence base in greater detail along with consultation results.

CHAPTER 2

NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

We have been concerned to ensure that a wide range of intelligence is brought together so that the Housing Strategy is fully aware of all main issues affecting West Somerset, not just those directly related to housing; and that the priorities at the sub regional, regional and national levels are also understood. This section draws on that intelligence to provide a description of the context for the Housing Strategy and the challenges it faces. The Housing Strategy makes explicit links to these wider issues wherever possible. Where appropriate some of this evidence is referred to in the main body of the strategy, however to ensure that the strategy flows well and is kept to a reasonable length, the bulk of the contextual information, and the evidence base is contained in Appendices 2 and 3.

2.1 THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE

This Housing Strategy is being launched at a time of current economic instability that has seen a sharp deterioration in the housing market.

'lenders won't lend, borrowers can't borrow, builders can't build and buyers can't buy'²

There has been an unprecedented decline in the number of house sales and the market for new loans has been worst hit, down 43% in the first half of 2008, compared to the first half of 2007. Average house prices across Somerset as a whole fell from £193,010 at the start of 2008, to £169,669 at the end of the year. There has been a sharp contraction in new building followed by a slump in sales, site visits and reservations. Site visits and reservations were about 80% down by

² The credit crunch and regeneration: impact and implications, An independent report to CLG, January 2009

midsummer 2008 compared to the previous year, according to the House Builders Federation and house builders shares have fallen to low levels.

A significant contraction in private sector activity will affect not only the supply of open market housing, but also affordable homes provided via planning obligations. Borrowing has become more difficult for housing associations and there is much less potential for cross subsidy from housing for outright sale or low cost home ownership. At the same time a rise in the rate of home repossessions is creating additional demand. Applications for mortgage repossessions to Taunton County Court were 15% higher in the third quarter of 2008 than they were in the same period in 2007³.

If there is a positive aspect, it is that there is an appetite for considering innovative approaches that would not have received support before the credit crunch. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is adopting a more flexible approach to grant funding and resources have been brought forward that were scheduled for spend in later years. We will be seeking to capitalise on these opportunities without losing sight of our long term goals.

Economic development is an important agenda for the future. The recent Review of Sub National Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) will establish 'economic prosperity' as the primary goal for all areas. In West Somerset consultation consistently shows that concerns about the low wage economy and worklessness are high priorities.

2.2 PLACE-SHAPING – A NEW PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR PLACES

There is a new 'architecture' for local government that is designed to shift the focus from just delivering services to delivering overall outcomes for places. The term 'place-shaping' is supported by a number of agencies which have each changed their way of working to encourage councils and partners working together to focus on outcomes, on places, and on residents' experiences. The Audit Commission together with other inspectorates will be starting from the perspective of what is going on in a place – being delivery by the full range of partners – when undertaking Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA). The new HCA is establishing its primary relationship with local authorities and will determine the level of housing investment and other resources through a 'conversation' with the authority around its specific circumstances and the broad place-outcomes it is aiming to achieve in partnership with others. In Somerset this will be done on a countywide basis. The new Tenant Services Authority is focusing very strongly on resident outcomes in places. More information about the new architecture for place-shaping is provided in Appendix 2.

³ Appendix 2 provides a fuller summary of the wider policy context at a national, regional, sub regional and local level, including the Government's housing policy response to the credit crunch.

2.3 WEST SOMERSET WITHIN THE WIDER SOUTH WEST REGION

The core strategy of the South West Regional Development Agency is focused on:

- Creating the conditions for productivity-led growth
- Developing a low carbon economy
- Creating successful places – particularly the places identified as priority areas

One of those place identified as a priority, is the ‘Northern Peninsula’ (North Cornwall, Torridge, North Devon, West Somerset). This area is a priority because the economy is in particular need of support and development to achieve its potential.

The most recent Regional Housing Strategy covers the period 2005 to 2016 and has three strategic aims:

- Improving the balance of housing markets
- Achieving good quality home
- Supporting sustainable communities

2.4 SUB-REGIONAL LINKS

The Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy (SSCS) has an aim concerned with ‘Living sustainably’ under which key challenges relate to climate change, affordability and sustainable communities. There are a number of other challenges under different aims in the SCS that housing also contributes to. These are detailed fully in Appendix 2 and include contributions to:

- Engaging communities and encouraging participation
- Action to strengthen the local economy including providing opportunities for young people and addressing worklessness
- Promoting independent living
- Community safety, mutual respect and reducing domestic abuse
- High risk health issues including teenage pregnancy and mental health

The Somerset SCS also sets out the following key issues for West Somerset:

- Ensuring adequate affordable housing
- Having regular and fast public transport to other major towns in the area
- Encouraging economic development that supports employment with decent pay and training

- Reducing vandalism, bullying and other crime. Dealing with the fear of crime
- Conserving the environment

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) is based on the objectives set out in the SCS and translates them into targets. It is the principle delivery mechanism for the Somerset SCS.⁴

The Somerset Economic Strategy identifies Taunton, Yeovil and Bridgwater as the main centres for growth. The Local Transport plan sees Taunton to Minehead as a 'strategic route' but there are no proposals for investment. Appendix 2 also provides information relating to health and to a joint strategic needs assessment. There is also regional work more directly concerned with housing relating to Supporting People, Homelessness, Strategic Housing Market Assessments and a draft Sub-regional Housing Strategy. These are all referred to in relation to relevant priorities in the Housing Strategy.

CHAPTER 3

A PICTURE OF WEST SOMERSET

It is important that the Housing Strategy relates to the specific characteristics of the West Somerset area and both understands and responds to local challenges.

West Somerset is a small rural authority with a dispersed settlement pattern. Two thirds of the district lies within the Exmoor National Park, which also straddles the boundary with North Devon. The coastal town of Minehead is the only sizeable settlement with a population of around 10,000. The majority of the population of West Somerset lives along a fairly narrow coastal strip that includes Watchet and Williton. Towards the southern edge of the district, is the market town of Dulverton that lies within the Exmoor National Park. After Minehead, these are the most significant settlements, although all are very small when compared to areas outside the district.

There are three main factors that are influencing, and are likely to continue to influence life in West Somerset:

- Connectivity – Like many rural areas, West Somerset has poor transport infrastructure. The only trains are those running on the heritage railway for the tourism industry, and road connections are poor. There are no plans for any major investment before 2020 at a minimum. Those living in the rural areas are heavily reliant on car use. There are bus services, but with plenty of room for improvement.

⁴ Appendix 4 demonstrates links between the Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy, the Local Area Agreement, the Community Strategy for West Somerset and the Housing Strategy

- Economy – West Somerset has a low wage economy dominated by tourism, agriculture and care services. In Minehead, Butlins is by far the biggest employer. The last few years have seen quite strong growth in the number of jobs, but not an improvement in the quality of employment and wage levels. There is also a relatively high proportion of the working age population who are not in regular employment and worklessness is seen as a significant issue.
- Demographics – The population profile of West Somerset is one of, if not the, oldest in the country. In common with most areas very large increases, particularly in the very elderly population are expected. This will also have implications for the proportion of the population that have issues related to health and disability. In West Somerset, these trend will take place alongside a decline in the younger and working age population, a trend that is not evident in the majority of other areas, and will further imbalance the population in West Somerset.

These factors are all set against the backdrop of the credit crunch and recession. Housing and the financial markets are inextricably entwined. The credit crunch has its roots in the housing markets with defaults in sub-prime loans in the United States.

3.1 WEST SOMERSET SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY – *MAKING LIFE BETTER FOR US ALL*

The vision for West Somerset, *Making life better for us all* is set out in the West Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy:

WEST SOMERSET VISION

MAKING LIFE BETTER FOR US ALL

OUR ECONOMIC VISION: A PROSPEROUS WEST SOMERSET

By 2020 there will be a thriving local economy in West Somerset. People will be able to work close to where they live. The economy will benefit from creative and knowledge-based industries, which don't rely on high levels of commuting. People will be suitably skilled to work in these industries and will have access to continuing training to update their skills. As a result they will be well paid.

OUR SOCIAL VISION: A WELCOMING STRONG AND BALANCED COMMUNITY

By 2020 West Somerset will provide enough opportunities for young people to stay in the district after their education. The population will primarily consist of older people, but everyone who lives in the district will feel safe and accepted as part of the local community.

OUR ENVIRONMENTAL VISION: AN INCREASINGLY SELF SUFFICIENT WEST SOMERSET

By 2020 West Somerset will be noted for its rapid progress in introducing a low-carbon economy minimizing damaging emissions. The economy will be thriving

because of the new business opportunities this will have created. Businesses and individuals will have learned how to minimize their impact on the environment. The district will produce more of its own food and generate its energy locally. There will be sufficient affordable housing available for people in West Somerset. People will live in energy efficient housing and have a much lower impact on the planet's resources (ecological footprints). They will appreciate the benefits of the local region and reduce travel to elsewhere. Towns will be safe and the environment will be well managed to minimize the use of resources and reduce the impacts of climate change.

HOUSING PRIORITIES WITHIN THE WEST SOMERSET SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Housing is identified as a key theme and the Strategy contains the following aims:

- To provide sufficient appropriate housing, by
 - Identifying the housing need in West Somerset and Exmoor
 - Providing adequate affordable housing to rent and buy
 - Making best use of empty housing stock
- To improve the condition, energy efficiency and resource efficiency of housing
 - Implementing existing sustainable principles and policies through the planning system
 - Ensuring that there are more homes in good condition, with particular emphasis on private sector housing
 - Raising awareness of the environmental impact of housing
 - Raising awareness of existing grants and advice on insulation and fuel efficiency
- To reduce levels of homelessness and use of temporary accommodation
 - Providing coordinated housing advice services to vulnerable people
 - Raising awareness of the wide range of housing needs in West Somerset

3.2 HOW HOUSING CAN SUPPORT A PROSPEROUS WEST SOMERSET

A housing offer to support economic growth

The type of housing available in an area has wide ranging impacts. The nature of the housing, its size and tenure, where it is located, its condition and its cost, all have implications for the type of people that live in an area, their health, and the availability of jobs and services. It is therefore important to consider how housing relates to the challenges and ambitions for an area as a whole.

Different types of investment in housing and related works to improve the quality of a place can have an impact on the local economy. The right housing, including affordable housing, is essential to attract and retain a skills base that will encourage inward investment.

The recently established Homes and Communities Agency joins up the delivery of housing and regeneration under one roof. The remit for the agency entails not only the delivery of housing (both affordable and within the private sector) but also the creation and regeneration of sustainable communities within which these homes are built.

West Somerset has a low wage economy much of which is based around tourism. There are difficulties in attracting new businesses to the area. Some of these are physical, including the peripheral and rural nature of the area, poor transport links and some regeneration needs. There are some issues relating to the quality of the housing stock. There are not, however issues concerning the wholesale regeneration of housing areas. The issues that link housing with the economy in West Somerset are about ensuring a supply of affordable housing so that working age people are not forced to leave, and about addressing worklessness amongst those resident in the area. The provision of affordable housing is a key theme in both the West Somerset and the Somerset County Sustainable Community Strategies.

West Somerset struggles with making available a labour force to attract businesses. The district has a very high proportion of older people. In common with many rural areas West Somerset has seen, and is expected to continue to see, a loss of younger working age people. The drivers for this relate to both a lack of good employment opportunities and high house prices.

Retaining young economically active households

The ability to retain economically active households is an important component of economic success. Young people in rural areas are reliant on a very restricted supply of affordable housing. They tend to leave home earlier to seek affordable accommodation in urban areas and those who remain are reliant on their parents for longer. **We will seek to retain economically active households by increasing the availability of affordable housing.**

Tackling worklessness

Unemployment and worklessness is often concentrated amongst disadvantaged groups and within local communities and many suffer from multiple barriers to employment. This can result in long term disengagement from the labour market. In reaching out to engage them and raise aspirations, employment and skills provision needs to be joined up with other support services to meet their needs.

Interventions with workless people are required over a sustained period in order to make a difference. Time is needed to build trust and there is a need for ongoing support to help them back into sustained employment or self employment. **Housing advice services and social housing providers are well placed to tackle worklessness.**

Statistical information relating to the proportion of working age people in the population, employment activity and benefit claimants can all be found in Appendix 3.

3.3 HOW HOUSING CAN SUPPORT A WELCOMING STRONG AND BALANCED COMMUNITY

Sustainable rural communities

There are hidden costs to living in a rural area and some big challenges are currently being faced. Those living in rural communities struggle to access housing. Residents often have to compete for housing with incoming households who are likely to have more resources at their disposal. There are issues associated with second homes, high house prices, an acute shortage of affordable housing, the closure of village post offices, poor transport, increasing centralisation of health and education services and a predominance of unrewarding, low paid work.

The lack of working people in rural villages was brought up as an issue during our consultation and the need for housing development, jobs and services to keep villages and rural communities alive.

Rural settlements do not always compare well against sustainability criteria. However, when clustered together, groups of settlements may be more sustainable than when considered alone. The issue in rural areas is not just about building in the most sustainable parts, but about considering what is needed to keep existing settlements sustainable.⁵

Urban considerations can easily dominate the policy framework. A key concern for the strategy is to make sure that sub-regional and regional partners are aware of the

⁵ Appendix 2 contains headlines from Matthew Taylor's report on rural economy and affordable housing which contributes to a growing consensus that challenges the assumption that sustainable development can only be in cities.

economic potential of areas such as West Somerset and the types of housing interventions needed to support that economic potential. Regional agencies also need to be aware of the consequences of not responding to the needs in these areas which is likely to result in increased pressure on urban areas as people migrate and commute to satisfy their needs. **The challenge for West Somerset is to make sure that the housing issues are not lost amongst bigger numbers elsewhere.** Small staff numbers in small district councils pose additional challenges in the ability to influence and make sure that the rural voice is heard. There is potential for the move towards city regions and large unitary authorities to exacerbate this issue.

Providing affordable homes in Exmoor National Park

Two thirds of West Somerset District is within Exmoor National Park. Access to affordable housing to meet local need is seen as a key priority. The Park Management Plan states that:

The lack of affordable homes, particularly for young people wishing to work and remain living on Exmoor, is a major problem for the longer term health and sustainability of local communities and there is a commitment by all the key local organizations to make a real and positive difference over the course of the plan period to 2012.

Within the park area new build housing development is restricted to defined local rural centres and villages. All new housing is for local people with a strong local connection, and who are in affordable housing need. These restrictive policies have meant that cross subsidy from open market dwellings has not been possible, but land values are substantially reduced. This reduces costs in providing affordable homes but increases reliance on grant funding. A total of 21 local needs affordable homes have been completed in the National Park area since the adoption of the local plan in March 2005⁶ and further schemes are in the pipeline. There is local disquiet about incoming households, second homes and the lack of ability for local people to access the housing market. There is a need to better understand how housing needs arising in the national park area are being met.

House prices are high in all parts of West Somerset but are noticeably higher within the Exmoor National Park area. The Northern Peninsula Strategic Housing Market Assessment highlights the Exmoor National Park as one of three distinctive house price 'hotspots, the others being around Padstow and Croyde.

The draft regional spatial strategy requires that 2,500 new residential dwellings are built in the West Somerset planning authority area between 2006 and 2026. An additional 240 are required within the national park, which cover two thirds of the

⁶ www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

district, unless there is proof of additional need. The remainder will need to be provided outside of the national park area. This will be a considerable challenge.

Meeting the needs of vulnerable households in Minehead and other parts of the district

Minehead is one of the smaller coastal towns in the country. There is a mixed picture relating to employment. Compared to other coastal towns, Minehead has relatively positive statistics relating to the proportion of the working age population in employment, growth in employment between 1998/99 and 2005/06; and the number of VAT registered businesses. Minehead also a high proportion of employee jobs in distribution, hotels and restaurants; a high level of seasonal fluctuation in unemployment; a low proportion of the workforce in managerial or professional positions; and a low proportion of residents with higher level qualifications (Minehead scores well in relation to other coastal towns at GCSE level).⁷

The working age benefit claimant rates are above the national average, and rank 20th highest out of the 37 coastal towns. The increase in claimant rates has however been 4th highest in Minehead between 1999 and 2007. This increase is related to increases in Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disablement Allowance rather than Job Seekers Allowance (for which claims have decreased) or income support for lone parents. These findings chime with views expressed during the consultation process relating to vulnerable people, often but not exclusively young, sometimes having originally employed in the tourism industry, who fail to integrate into the community and maintain a lifestyle in bedsits. There are related issues concerning substance and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, and low level crime and anti-social behaviour. It must however be stressed that West Somerset is a very low crime area. **The Housing Strategy is concerned with the accessibility and quality of housing and support services and providing advice on the options available.**

The private rented sector often provides accommodation for some of the most vulnerable people. Those currently residing in private rented housing in West Somerset include migrant workers, mainly from eastern Europe.

Legislation requires that certain types of houses in multiple occupation need to be licensed. This process is well underway and needs to be completed. Priority needs to be given to those properties that pose the greatest risk.

Landlords need to be offered encouragement and incentives and options to meet good management and stock conditions standards. Where successful this can avoid unnecessary time and expense in pursuing enforcement action, however the option of enforcement action needs to remain available.

⁷ Data taken from a benchmarking study, Englands Seaside Towns, further information from this study is contained in Appendix 3

West Somerset's older residents

The ageing population has been described as a demographic time bomb with emphasis placed on additional costs for health, social care and pensions.

The proportion of older people in the population is rising rapidly and many end up in costly care homes at some point. Practical help is needed for older people to live independent active lives for longer.

The proportion of older people in West Somerset is one of, if not the, highest in the country. Very large increases in the number of older people, including frail older people with support needs, are expected over the next 20 years.⁸

In 2025 there are expected to be 39,100 people in West Somerset, of which 14,700 (37.6%) will be 65 and over and 2,800 (7.2%) will be 85 and over.⁹

The existing housing stock has not, for the most part, been designed with the needs of older people in mind. Even where dwellings have been specifically built for older people, expectations change over time, so they may no longer be suitable. The ageing of the population is a significant issue for housing services that requires a coordinated strategic response to plan for the future.

The rural nature of the area, affordability issues, off gas areas, poor quality of some of the housing stock, and dwellings without level access all pose particular challenges. **Providing advice, support and appropriate housing for the ageing of the population in West Somerset is one of the main strategic challenges for housing services.**

3.4 HOW HOUSING CAN SUPPORT AN INCREASINGLY SELF SUFFICIENT WEST SOMERSET

Access to affordable housing

The combination of low wages and high house prices means that the affordability of housing in West Somerset is some of the worst in the country. As, already stated, many people working in West Somerset are in low paid jobs and a good supply of affordable housing is needed to house these workers.

West Somerset is situated on the border of what have been defined regionally as the Northern Peninsula and the Taunton Housing markets. Because of this the district has been included in two recent Strategic Housing Market Assessments. The two

⁸ Appendix 3 contains further information about the current and likely future age profile in West Somerset, living arrangements for older people and health statistics

⁹ Projecting Older People Information System www.poppi.org.uk

assessments used different methods, but reach very similar conclusions about the level of housing need. The Northern Peninsula Strategic Housing Market Assessment (NPSHMA) estimates the net annual need for affordable housing to be 271 dwellings, while the Somerset Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SSHMA) estimates the annual need for affordable housing to be 269 dwellings. The SSHMA estimates that 25% could afford an intermediate option.¹⁰

Past delivery of new affordable homes has been minimal and recent increases in provision need to be maintained and accelerated to make inroads in meeting housing need.

There is a need to increase the availability of good quality affordable housing both from new provision and from the existing stock; and to minimize further demand through action to prevent homelessness.

We have already referred to the impact of the economic downturn on housing delivery. In particular the credit crunch has led to a significant reduction in the availability of mortgages for shared ownership properties and there are particular problems around the availability of 100% loan to value mortgages. There is currently also poor lender appetite for rural schemes. This is because of restrictions that are often applied in rural areas, such as not allowing purchasers of shared ownership housing to 'staircase' up to full ownership, or putting geographical or other restrictions on who can occupy dwellings. Problems around mortgage availability for shared ownership products is a critical issue for progressing housing development schemes. The overall supply of new affordable housing is dependent on housing associations' ability to cross subsidise development costs.

It isn't just the number of affordable homes that is important, but also the provision of the right type of housing in the right locations and the right housing support services. A desire for self build was expressed through the consultation process and an action that will explore further the potential for self build has been included.

There is the potential to meet more of the shortage of affordable housing through the private rented sector.

Empty homes constitute a wasted resource and can also impact negatively on the area as a whole. **The Housing Strategy recognises the need to encourage empty homes to be brought back into use and where possible to be made available as affordable housing.**

¹⁰ Further detail relating to the Strategic Housing Market Assessments is contained in Appendices 2 and 3

During the year from 1st April 2007 to 31st March 2008, there were 43 households accepted as homeless and in priority need in West Somerset. This is an increase from 29 households during the previous year.

Environmental standards for housing and addressing fuel poverty

The need to reduce greenhouse gases from residential dwellings, and through this action to increase the energy efficiency of dwellings and address fuel poverty, is a recurrent theme through national level strategies down to the parish and individual development level. High environmental and sustainability standards are clear priorities for both the district and the county LSPs. This consistency is also carried through into this Housing Strategy.

Further synergy is created by the opportunities for economic growth offered by 'green collar' jobs.¹¹ The economic potential in this area is recognised by both local partners and the Regional Development Agency.

New residential buildings are much more energy efficient than old ones, but the replacement rate is very low.

West Somerset is particularly prone to fuel poverty. Wage levels are low, many properties are off gas and electricity is more expensive. The lack of mains gas for space and water heating to nearly 60% of West Somerset homes is a major disadvantage in terms of CO₂, fuel poverty and the local economy. Wood fuel boilers appear to offer the most suitable option for micro-generation both in terms of CO₂ saving and cost effectiveness.

Many of the properties themselves are hard to treat. There is a large number of listed properties that do not lend themselves to being easily insulated, and high numbers of properties are second homes or are in the private rented sector with little incentive to improve the properties thermal efficiency.

3.5 KEY STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS

The Housing Strategy provides the mechanism through which the housing elements of the Somerset LAA will be delivered along with the housing priorities within the Sustainable Community Strategies at both district and county level, and sub regional and regional Housing Strategies. Appendix 4 demonstrates how these strategies relate to each other. They all recognize the need for increased availability of

¹¹ See Appendix 2 for information relating to The Code for Sustainable Homes, Climate Change actions in the Somerset SCS, the West Somerset Climate Change Strategy, requirements for high environmental sustainability standards in the Watchet Community Strategic Plan. Appendix 4 further demonstrates strategic links concerning these issues and relevant statistics are contained in Appendix 3.

affordable housing, the need to address fuel poverty, and to tackle worklessness. There is further synergy around promoting independent living and meeting the needs of older people, those with disabilities and carers.

There is a two way relationship between the Housing Strategy, these high level documents and a wide variety of other strategies. These include strategies specifically related to housing, such as the new sub-regional Homelessness Strategy and the Empty Homes Strategy which is to be developed over the coming year, but also strategies that are not directly housing related, but nevertheless have links to housing agendas such as health, economy and transport strategies. These strategies need to be informed by the range of knowledge and expertise that feeds into the Housing Strategy, to take account of bottom up as well as top down influences. The various partnerships in place across Somerset are the groups through which the necessary interactions will take place. Somerset is currently developing enhanced two tier working through Pioneer Somerset and the various structures and partnerships will evolve during this process. The Housing Strategy has a role in developing the housing aspects of this and in linking to other areas so that West Somerset housing inputs are made, and that these are organised and coordinated, timely, and expressed through appropriate structures. Chapter 10 describes changes taking place to introduce enhanced two tier working. This will mean an increase in shared services across the country and the 'partnership landscape' is evolving as a result of these changes.

3.6 THE HOUSING STRATEGY WILL BE A SUCCESS IN THE LONG TERM IF:

- Our rural settlements and market and coastal towns are sustainable
- Minehead is a vibrant economic centre and has a balanced community
- Vulnerable people are able to access integrated support services to secure and maintain housing and where possible employment and training
- The prevalence of alcohol, substance abuse and mental health issues and problems do not become entrenched
- Comprehensive information is available for older people on a wide range of housing and support options including information relating to care and support services and adaptations to allow people to remain in their homes and other housing options. This information includes that related to the financial implications of various options and the grants, benefits and loans that can be accessed
- A wide range of housing and support is available to meet the housing needs of older people

- There is an adequate supply of affordable housing of the right type to meet identified needs
- Minimal numbers of people are presenting as and being found to be homeless
- There is a decrease in the number of homes that fail to meet the decent homes standard especially amongst those occupied by vulnerable people
- There is an increase in the energy efficiency rating of homes, especially those occupied by vulnerable people
- A diverse range of good quality, well managed housing stock is available for private renting, with an increased amount available at affordable rents
- There is a coherent, well managed and customer focused approach to housing service delivery. There is integrated and coordinated activity aimed at achieving shared priorities in the most cost effective way. Clear structures, processes and accountability, with performance and risk management are embedded.

Specific measures for achieving these outcomes, and targets where they have been set, are included under the relevant chapters in the next section – The Housing Strategy.

SECTION 2 THE HOUSING STRATEGY

This section is organised around three key themes:

- People
 - Meeting the housing needs of an ageing population
 - Tackling worklessness and addressing other social investment priorities
 - Preventing and dealing with homelessness and addressing housing support needs
- Future housing development and increasing the availability of affordable housing
 - Providing the framework for future housing provision
 - Increasing the provision of new affordable housing
 - Making best use of existing housing stock
- Promoting good housing conditions and energy efficient homes
 - Encouraging home owners to maintain their homes to a decent standard
 - Achieving decent homes in the social sector
 - Promoting a good quality private rented sector

Each chapter includes measures for success, which, for the most part, have been selected from the indicators that make up the Somerset wide LAA.

CHAPTER 4

FOCUS ON PEOPLE

This chapter focuses on the housing and support needs of groups of people living in West Somerset. It addresses the demographic challenges raised by an ageing population and the need to support the economy through supporting people into work. It is concerned with preventing homelessness and assisting those who are homeless and with providing housing support services for vulnerable groups.

Measures of success

- LAA outcome 139: People over 65 who say that they receive the information, assistance and support needed to exercise choice and control to live independently

- LAA outcome 142: Percentage of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living.

LAA outcome: People in Somerset are not unnecessarily excluded from paid employment. Measured by:

- National Indicator 152 – Working age people on out of work benefits. Baseline for West Somerset 11.38% (2007). Target 1% improvement over the first 2 years. 1.5% overall improvement over the three target years 2009 – 2011
- National indicator 153 – Working age people on out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods

PRIORITY 1: ADDRESS THE HOUSING NEEDS OF AN AGEING POPULATION

The proportion of older people in West Somerset is one of, it not the, highest in the country. Very large increases in the number of older people, including frail older people with support needs, are expected over the next 20 years¹².

What we are already doing to address the housing needs of older people

- WSC and stakeholder partners organised an Ageing Well in West Somerset event in 2008
- Advice and information relating to housing options is available for all residents although not yet targeted specifically for older people
- Improvements and adaptations are available via the Home Improvement Agency (HIA). The agency, originally based in Sedgemoor, expanded to include West Somerset in 2004
- The HIA has been relaunched with new promotional material as Somerset West Care and Repair Limited. The agency facilitates Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) work across the partnership area. It also provides small repairs and a hospital discharge scheme through it's handyman. NHS Somerset funds the discharge scheme.
- The Northern Peninsula Housing Market Assessment has established the need for 2 bedroom accommodation for older people as the most significant future housing need in the area

¹² Statistics relating to older people, their housing circumstances and information relating to their health and support needs is included in Appendix 3

- The Somerset wide ‘Vision for Sheltered Housing in Somerset Project’ reported in October 2007. The project recommends the adoption of a hub and spoke model for sheltered housing¹³.
- A county wide assessment tool has been developed to provide a consistent approach for providers letting sheltered housing across the county
- The services offered from sheltered housing schemes have been broadened to include greater outreach to the community. A meals delivery service operates within a 10 mile radius of Watchet

What else we will do

Given that the ageing population is a key strategic priority for housing for the future, some further dedicated work to better understand the likely issues and possible solutions is necessary. This will build on the work undertaken at county level and will put in place a framework for future action. It will develop a more detailed understanding of the take up of services by older people and consider supply and demand information in different parts of the district. It will include data analysis, such as that relating to lettings, consulting directly with older residents about their current and future housing circumstances, and considering best practice relating to housing and older people and their carers. A number of concerns have been raised by providers including the need for 2 bed accommodation designed specifically for older people and the need to retain current levels of Supporting People funding.

To address this priority we aim to:

- Introduce a banded system of housing support for older people that is tenure neutral and based on need
- Develop a strategic framework for meeting older people’s housing and support needs in West Somerset.
- Approach other authorities of a rural character with similarly high proportions of older people to explore opportunities to jointly develop good practice in meeting the housing needs of older people, including investigating the potential for cohousing.
- Agree with partners a comprehensive package of housing advice for older people including financial aspects
- Identify priority areas for new provision, using a hub and spoke model of extra care housing. Whilst good practice suggests that housing for older people is located near facilities, this can pose a problem in rural areas as often the priority for people, is to remain in the area where they currently live

¹³ Further details of the Vision for Sheltered Housing in Somerset Project are included in Appendix 2

- Complete a review of extra care housing
- With partners across the district, establish what is already known about the potential for the future use of assistive technology with specific reference to telecare, and how it might be utilised in the district.

PRIORITY 2: TACKLE WORKLESSNESS AND ADDRESS OTHER SOCIAL INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

Strengthening Minehead's position as a vibrant centre, including developing a masterplan for its regeneration, is a priority of the West Somerset Economic Strategy. Regeneration from a housing perspective in West Somerset, is about tackling worklessness, improving accessibility and providing flexible support. Our consultation revealed concerns about socio-economic challenges including worklessness, particularly in, but not restricted to Minehead. There are also associated issues of substance and alcohol abuse and mild mental health problems requiring integrated support. Housing partners in the area including Magna and Knightstone Housing Associations work together with the council and the police on issues concerning anti-social behavior and community safety.

What we are already doing to tackle worklessness and address other social investment priorities

To date, there hasn't been a focus on worklessness, with issues around employment being seen to mainly concern insecure, low paid work, linked to problems with benefit take up. Self employment is also insecure. There are good local relationships between housing providers and those providing health services such as GP's, Health Visitors and Community Psychiatric Nurses. Some examples of current initiatives are:

- Magna housing association is involved with the West Somerset Advice Bureau on work around financial inclusion
- The Somerset LAA includes an outcome to ensure that 'people in Somerset are not unnecessarily excluded from paid employment'. A baseline and targets have been set. The focus for this outcome is on Sedgemoor and West Somerset as they are the worst performing districts in terms of the number of working age people claiming out of work benefits
- The Seaward Way Dream Scheme was introduced in Minehead to give residents the opportunity to do something positive about their estate, take pride in the area they live in and to help reduce anti-social behavior. As part of the scheme a 'clean up day' was organised and children taking part were rewarded with a football training session at Plymouth Argyle

What else we will do

The West Somerset Economic Task Force, Employment and Skills Sub Group will provide a lead in achieving targets set out in the Somerset LAA to reduce levels of worklessness in the district. Housing organisations will contribute to the development of an action plan.

Research is to be undertaken to understand the local labour market and geographical worklessness issues facing the two districts. There is a need to better understand the provision of help and assistance already available relating to worklessness (including financial assistance) to move people towards employment.

West Somerset Housing Forum are keen to build on good relationships with health service providers at an operational level and to develop a more strategic and coordinated approach to partnership working. To address this priority we aim to:

- In conjunction with RSL partners, use an instrument such as the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) toolkit: Tackling Worklessness, to plan a strategic approach and implement and evaluate worklessness initiatives
- Work with the Somerset Strategic Housing Officers Group to establish priorities for social investment, identify and replicate good practice and explore funding opportunities
- Establish social investment initiatives
- Introduce a coordinated strategic approach to financial inclusion that establishes consistency in advice given by different agencies and develops links between housing, benefits, training and employment advice
- Develop proposals within the local connections rule of the Choice Based Lettings policy to allow people in work to access affordable housing options
- Carry out a feasibility study, investigate models and establish the need for a foyer
- Establish a task and finish group to investigate ways in which partnership working can improve the effectiveness of work to deliver housing and health priorities

PRIORITY 3: PREVENT AND DEAL WITH HOMELESSNESS AND ADDRESS HOUSING SUPPORT PRIORITIES

A sub regional homelessness strategy has recently been completed and the priorities identified are shown in Appendix 2. Statistics relating to homelessness are shown in Appendix 3.

£2m of Supporting People funding per annum going into West Somerset from a county wide pot of around £21m.

Somerset is recognised nationally as leading the way in Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. Gypsies and Travellers represent one of the most significant minority groups in Somerset.

What we are already doing to deal with homelessness and address housing support priorities and the need for specialist provision

- A sub regional homelessness strategy has just been completed for the period 2008 to 2011. The homelessness strategy action plan identifies actions under five priorities¹⁴:
 - Floating support services.
 - Homeless prevention.
 - Improved access to the private rented sector.
 - Improved access to appropriate housing.
 - Improve protocols & partnerships to tackle homelessness
- Magna West Somerset provides a complete service to victims of domestic abuse across West Somerset. Services include the provision of 'safe houses' and an advocacy service for victims, and for perpetrators referral to a perpetrator programme. WSC provides funding for one of the posts. This provision was set up in a way to better meet the needs of rural communities than a refuge would have been able to achieve.
- A sheltered housing scheme with bedsits has been remodeled to provide two bed flats
- A rough sleepers count was completed on the 2nd April 2009 and did not record any rough sleepers

What else we will do

The economic downturn is seeing an increase in the number of homes being repossessed. Ensuring that good information is available on the possible avenues of help to avoid people losing their homes is a clear priority at the present time.

The Sub-regional Homelessness Strategy includes detailed actions to be taken forward across the sub-region. The detail has not been repeated here, but high level actions seen as most relevant to West Somerset have been included.

¹⁴ Further detail can be found in Appendix 2

There are currently four safe houses for victims of domestic violence and a need for at least one more.

Somerset County currently has a number of Gypsy and Traveller sites, including one in West Somerset, which is leased to WSC. SCC are currently seeking to make new management arrangement to ensure the site is managed by housing specialists. To address this priority we aim to:

- Review best practice and prepare a comprehensive package of advice to help avoid people losing their homes
- Improve support for intentionally homeless households
- Address the accommodation and support needs of migrant workers
- Review existing deposit/bond schemes in order to improve their appeal to private sector landlords
- Explore the potential of Private Sector Leasing to secure accommodation as settled rather than temporary
- Improve existing protocols & develop new protocols to aid partnership working
- Consider options for the future management of the Gypsy and Traveller site at Farrington Hill, Stogursey
- Agree future housing support priorities with Somerset Supporting People team.

CHAPTER 5

FOCUS ON FUTURE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND INCREASING THE AVAILABILITY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

This chapter is about the framework needed to meet current and future housing requirements. It is concerned with how we plan for the future provision of housing and how we increase access to affordable housing both through new provision and by making better use of the existing housing stock.

Measures of success

A reduction in outward migration of working age people

Somerset LAA outcome: to promote an increase in the supply of affordable housing.

Measured by:

National Indicator 155: Number of affordable homes delivered (Gross). Overall target of 1835 homes across Somerset by April 2012 (611 per annum). The target

has been broken down across Somerset. The annual target for West Somerset has been set at 40, which recognises the relative scale of development in the area.

PRIORITY 4: PROVIDE THE FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE HOUSING PROVISION

What we are already doing to provide the framework for future housing provision

- The draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) has set a requirement for 2500 additional dwellings to be provided in West Somerset between 2006 and 2026
- For the Exmoor National Park area, the emerging RSS requires that an estimated 20 homes per year should be built, for local need only
- Accelerating the production of the Local Development Framework is part of the improvement plan for housing. An appointment has been made to a new post created for this purpose.
- Recently completed housing market assessments have helped us to understand the housing needs in the different parts of the district. The Northern Peninsula Housing market assessment draws a distinction between the very high value national park area and a self contained medium priced market around Minehead.
- Considerable complementary work has been carried out to improve the evidence base for housing policy, including two land availability studies and a strategic land viability assessment, an ongoing programme of local needs surveys, a county wide gypsy and traveller needs assessment, and a private sector stock condition survey. The Gypsy and traveller assessment is being further refreshed in 2009/10.
- In the neighbouring county a rural sustainability toolkit was commissioned by a range of Devon based organisations. Further funding has now been secured to roll the work out to other areas, initially in the South West.
- An economic strategy for West Somerset has been developed. The strategy highlights transformational changes seen as key that include; building on Minehead's position as the key economic centre in the District, the development of a rural enterprise network, and supporting low carbon technologies

- A proposed development at East Wharf, Watchet, consists of 86 apartments, a bistro/cafe, and new boat yard and commercial space. This is a private sector development which will stimulate regeneration in the area. It does not include affordable housing on site, but provides funding for affordable housing via a commuted sum

What else we will do

The vast majority of the new dwellings required by the regional spatial strategy are to be provided in the parts of the West Somerset not covered by the Exmoor National Park. Identifying land for this development will be a considerable challenge. Minehead's position is constrained by both its coastal location and a hill to one side of the town that borders on the national park. Geographical constraints also affect other key settlements.

The economic strategy recommends a masterplan for Minehead. Housing considerations will be a significant part of this. The Housing Strategy will support economic objectives by considering where sustainable rural development can be incorporated and support rural enterprise. The Community Plan for Watchet identifies affordability and environmental sustainability as issues. A flagship housing project is suggested and the possibilities for this will be explored further. In order to address this priority we aim to:

- Explore with Devon County Council and the South West Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP), piloting use of the rural sustainability toolkit for clustering rural areas
- Ensure Housing is a key component of the masterplan for the regeneration of Minehead
- Identify priority areas and priority dwellings for new development, including those dwellings needed to help support the economy
- Use the WSC Policy Advisory group to improve understanding of how investment in housing can support future economic success by
 - Examining the potential for housing activity to contribute to the generation of employment and business growth in West Somerset, including activity related to housing development; housing adaptation and care and support needs, including the potential for telecare services, for an ageing population; and retrofitting of energy saving measures in existing housing.
- Evaluate feasibility for a flagship environmental housing project in Watchet, as part of a 'Train and Build' scheme

PRIORITY 5: INCREASE THE PROVISION OF NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Access to affordable housing is a problem across the district, but even more so within the national park area.

What we are already doing to increase the provision of new affordable housing

- Staffing for affordable housing has been strengthened. A dedicated housing enabler takes the lead on delivery.
- The housing enabler works closely with the rural housing enabler who is employed by a consortia consisting of Somerset County Council, West Somerset Council, North Devon District Council, Exmoor National Park Authority and RSL's that operate in the project area.
- There were 29 affordable housing completions during 2008/09, which is an increase over the 25 completed in 2007/08 and closer to the target set in the Local Area Agreement of 40 dwellings per year to 2011/12. This has been affected by the economic downturn
- A multi-disciplinary affordable housing group has recently been extended to include external as well as internal partners. The group includes housing enabling and options services, the housing portfolio holder and shadow member, planning policy and development control, RSLs and a private development partner. The group has ensured a clear focus on driving affordable housing delivery and provides a forum for consideration of more strategic issues. Reporting lines are from the Affordable Housing Group to West Somerset Housing Forum and on to the West Somerset LSP.
- A protocol has been agreed for Housing Associations working with West Somerset Council
- During the early part of 2008/09, there have been four live development schemes where grant funding was secured via the Housing Corporation (now part of the HCA):
 - Grant funding of £334,295 has enabled Stonham Housing Association to complete the extension of an existing supported housing scheme, for young single people. It will provide an additional 2 units of accommodation at Lambrook House in Minehead. This scheme has recently been completed.
 - At Slade Close in Stogumber, Magna West Somerset are completing 4 rented, and 2 shared ownership dwellings with a total grant input of £306,000. Completion is scheduled for 2009/10

- The Ivy Cottage Site in Exford will provide 9 x 2 and 3 bedroom houses with grant funding of £675,000. They are being completed by Falcon Rural during 2009/10
- At Huish Lane in Washford Magna Housing Association are completing 2 X 2 bedroom houses with grant funding of £40,000 during 2009/10.
- During the process of drafting this Strategy, two further schemes have secured grant funding from the HCA:
 - Hayfield Close (formerly Marshfield Road) Alcombe – 23 homes of which 12 will be affordable rented and 1 low cost home ownership sold for 70% of open market value. Magna West Somerset have successfully bid for £816,000 grant to deliver the rented homes. The low cost home ownership homes will be delivered directly by the developer – Summerfield. This scheme is currently on site with completion expected towards the 4th quarter of 2009/10
 - Townsend, Williton – a development of 6 homes which achieved Planning Permission in February and was also subject to a successful bid for £409,000 by Magna West Somerset. Completion is due early in 2010/11
- In addition a scheme is on site using empty homes grant to bring units into use above shops in Watchet. This will result in two private rented flats which are rented at an affordable rate.
- A review has been completed which looked at the way the Council approaches developer contributions as part of the planning process and considers how best to ensure that developer contributions are optimized. The review recommended that the existing Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) relating to planning obligations be amended and in particular that it:
 - considers amending the affordable housing threshold in Minehead from 15 to 5 to reflect the district wide nature of housing need.
 - removes the direct preference for affordable housing to be located in the same village as the contributing development. This carries the risk that the Council is unable to procure sufficient affordable housing units in the immediate area.
 - The report further suggests that the Council would benefit from a more proactive and coordinated approach to the monitoring and enforcement of S106 Agreements. In particular, the council should ascertain for each development whether the trigger for the developer to pay has occurred.

What else we will do

The development process is lengthy so the results of an increased focus on enabling affordable housing will see further results in later years. At present, it is anticipated that there will be 54 affordable housing completions in 2009/10 and 130 in 2010/11. In order to address this priority we aim to:

- With Exmoor National Park Authority, produce a scoping document that considers the potential for future innovative affordable housing solutions on Exmoor giving particular attention to self build and work/live properties
- Continue to engage positively with The Homes and Communities agency to secure funding for new schemes. West Somerset has already had success in acquiring grant funding for new schemes during the year and will continue to take advantage of the Regular Market Engagement that occurs to get schemes on site as soon as it is feasible to do so. There is a further scheme for which the possibility of grant funding is to be investigated:
- Simonsbath – WSC have formally agreed to work in partnership with English Rural Housing Association to develop a scheme of five homes in Simonsbath. The site presents a number of challenges initial work has been completed and was presented by English Rural Housing Association in April 2009. The tenure of the homes to be delivered has not yet been determined and will be influenced by the market conditions and local housing need at the time of delivery. Subject to challenges being satisfactorily resolved and the scheme being viable, it is expected to start on site during 2010/11 with completion in early 2011/12.
- The potential for providing 100% affordable housing schemes on two exception sites, one in Watchet and one in Williton, is currently being explored. The Watchet site is made up of 32 homes and initial meetings with the town council have been positive. The Williton Site will be of similar size.
- Revise the existing Supplementary Planning Guidance to strengthen the requirements relating to affordable housing and in particular the thresholds beyond which affordable housing must be provided
- Formulate a strategy to improve the processes relating to securing, monitoring and enforcing planning obligations
- Complete a delivery strategy for new affordable housing
- The nature of the site at Carhampton has recently changed with the Community Land Trust becoming an advisory Group in part due to the economic downturn. The site is scheduled to be built out between 2009 and

2011. The proposal is now moving forward to create 16 affordable dwellings and 16 open market houses on the site. The original intention was to provide 30 properties – ten open market, ten shared ownership and ten social rent. Due to the current difficulties in providing shared ownership properties, the alternative property mix will now form the basis of the planning application.

- An internal planning obligation group has been set up to address the issues raised by the review of developer contributions. The production of a replacement Supplementary Planning Document has been commissioned to address many of these issues

PRIORITY 6: MAKE BEST USE OF EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

The Housing Improvement Plan following the Audit commission Strategic Housing Inspection identifies a need to develop a more robust approach to dealing with empty homes that make use of the full range of powers available.

What we are already doing to make best use of existing housing stock

- An incentive scheme is offered by Magna housing association for the release of larger properties that are being under-occupied
- A countywide choice based letting system is in operation which went live in December 2008.
- A rent deposit scheme is offered to private sector landlords
- Through partnering of private sector services across West Somerset and Sedgemoor, funding has been identified to appoint to a new post with a focus on bringing empty properties back into use

What else we will do to address the priority

- Consider potential demand for the ‘tenant incentive scheme’ and barriers to success
- An empty homes officer will be appointed. The post will be managed from Sedgemoor and will work across both districts.
- The first task for the empty homes officer will be to draw together the information that is available relating to empty homes in the area.
- The existing Empty Homes strategy will be reviewed and new targets for action agreed. An evaluation of the powers available for bringing empty properties back into use will be completed and a new Empty Homes Strategy for Somerset West will be developed

- A register of empty properties will be compiled that details the location and length of time empty and information and any information available regarding why properties are empty
- The Empty Homes strategy will identify a basis by which empty homes are prioritised for action to bring them back into use
- Negotiations will be held with Housing Association's operating in the area to consider the scope for partnership working in bringing empty homes back into use. This will be achieved through the affordable housing group.

CHAPTER 6

FOCUS ON PROMOTING GOOD HOUSING CONDITIONS AND ENERGY EFFICIENT HOMES

This chapter is about the condition, energy efficiency and management of housing in the district, and in particular, housing occupied by vulnerable households.

Measures of success

Somerset LAA outcome: A county which is working in partnership to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Measured by:

- National Indicator 186: Per capita CO₂ emissions in the Local Authority area
- National Indicator 187: Tackling fuel poverty – people receiving income based benefits living in homes with a low energy efficiency rating
- A Reduction in category 1 hazards in the private rented housing sector

PRIORITY 7: ENCOURAGE GOOD QUALITY ACCOMMODATION AND MANAGEMENT

What we are already doing to encourage good quality accommodation and management

- A private sector house condition survey has just been completed and will help to inform how resources are best targeted to address private sector house conditions
- In October 2007 Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership was established to deliver a joint private sector housing service across the two districts of West Somerset and Sedgemoor.

- The private sector renewal aspects of the service, dealing with grants and loans, were the first to be brought together and are now delivered from Sedgemoor District Council offices.
- A data sharing protocol is in place, new job descriptions have been agreed and appointed to and the grant records have been combined. A full grant service is now in operation.
- An enforcement policy for Somerset West has been agreed that sets out what can be expected from the regulatory service. Underlying the policy are the principles of proportionality, consistency, transparency and targeting.
- The enforcement element is based in West Somerset with an initial focus on mandatory HMO licensing and driving up standards of private rented properties.
- An inaugural joint landlords forum was held in October 2008. There were 79 landlords in attendance from across the two districts and there was positive feedback. There is now a biannual forum and in July 2009 there will be countywide landlords expo led by the partnership.

What else we will do

Although private sector enforcement services are now being delivered from West Somerset, there is further work needed to bring together the various strands of information and working practices. Further work to frame work programmes within the context of the Housing Strategy and to firm up the policy framework is needed. A more pro-active stance will be taken around enforcement action, particularly in relation to fuel poverty and to HMOs. The landlords newsletter has proved popular and we will continue to improve on information provided to landlords through a joint newsletter and through other methods. A landlord accreditation scheme is to be introduced and accredited landlords are to be able to advertise properties using the choice based lettings scheme. During our consultation on the strategy concerns were expressed about the effect that direct payments of housing benefit were having and it was suggested that this may be responsible for discouraging private sector landlords from entering the sector. To address the priority we aim to:

- Ensures the county wide Private Sector Housing Strategy is updated. We will ensure there is a further document that will identify the delivery of the services at a local level.
- Develop a Somerset West policy for the use of the Regulatory Reform Order
- We will work with all RSL`s to ensure they are on target to achieve the decent homes standard by 2010. Magna West Somerset are by far the largest social landlord in the district and their housing stock is on track to meet the standard.

- Prepare a statement to encapsulate how private sector resources are used to support the Housing Strategy across Somerset West
- Develop a Somerset West Enforcement Policy
- Develop a Home Maintenance Strategy
- Make improvements to the private sector housing information on both WSC and Sedgemoor Council websites, with appropriate links included
- Monitor the situation in relation to direct payments of housing benefit. Make representation to regional and national bodies if there are continuing difficulties
- Build on the integration of private sector enforcement services across West Somerset and Sedgemoor
- Complete mandatory HMO licensing across the partnership area.
- Introduce a landlord accreditation system
- Roll out Choice Based Lettings to private sector landlords
- A landlords newsletter will be jointly produced for Sedgemoor and West Somerset. This will contain generic information inside for both districts whilst retaining covers with separate identities and containing information specific to the individual districts

PRIORITY 8: PROMOTE ENERGY EFFICIENT HOMES

What we are already doing to promote energy efficient homes

- There is a Somerset wide fuel poverty partnership, which has its origins in West Somerset and Sedgemoor.
- In 2007 WSC demonstrated its commitment by signing up to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change ensuring that tackling climate change is a cornerstone of the council's strategy.
- West Somerset Strategic Partnership (WSSP) working together with WSC and Exmoor National Park Authority has produced a climate change strategy.
- In its management plan the Exmoor Park Authority set an ambitious target to be carbon neutral by 2025.
- In 2006/07 158 cavity wall and 252 roof insulations were completed. A further 156 households received measures under the warm front scheme.

- A Supporting People funded support worker provides help and advice to people such as around changing supplier, getting grants, help with paying fuel bills, what heating systems can be installed etc

What else we will do

West Somerset's latest report on air quality has recommended additional housing survey data be obtained, particularly on primary heating systems in the Porlock and Dulverton areas to help assess the combined impacts of biomass burning and solid fuel use. The data would be beneficial to give re-assurance on climate change initiatives in the area. The need for this additional data will be taken into account in the design of future surveys in the area and opportunities to obtain such data will be taken advantage of.

- The West Somerset Strategic Partnership (WSSP) has funded Forum 21 to deliver an energy efficiency campaign aimed at tackling the wider community and promoting the benefits of insulation and other energy efficiency measures.
- A new post is being created with a remit covering fuel poverty. This will be an enabling and coordinating role.
- A more strategic approach to fuel poverty is being developed to target geographical areas, using Fuel Poverty indicators derived from the census and house condition survey data to identify areas where there is a high risk. This information is to be mapped using GIS.
- Work with partner agencies to consider the contribution that new environmental technologies can make to sustainable living solutions and develop a statement relating to their most appropriate current use

SECTION 3 THE ACTION PLAN

CHAPTER 7

HOW THIS WILL BE DELIVERED

7.1 Governance

The community leadership role of local authorities requires enhanced skills in formulating, leading and working within partnerships that can place housing in its wider context of the local Sustainable Community Strategy.

‘Local authorities are the only parties at the local level with a cross-cutting remit and the democratic legitimacy to intervene to ensure that all aspects of the housing market in their area operate effectively’¹⁵.

Responsibility for steering delivery of the Strategy sits with the Strategic Housing Authority, WSC. However one of the key aims for this strategy is that it is a strategy for West Somerset. It is therefore appropriate that overarching monitoring of the Strategy lies with and is owned by West Somerset Strategic Partnership (WSSP). In order to achieve this linkage the action plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis via the West Somerset Strategic Housing Forum that reports to the WSSP. It will remain responsive to changing circumstances and if appropriate additions or changes will be made. The action plan will also be fully refreshed on an annual basis.

7.2 Day to day delivery

Implementation of the Housing Strategy is the duty of all those who are responsible for delivery of items in the action plan. This includes the Council itself, but also County officers and partner organisations. Securing the necessary buy in to the strategy has partly been achieved through the consultation carried out while the strategy has been developed. However, beyond formal approval of the strategy by WSC (WSC), it is essential that there is an agreed process through which the strategy’s implementation is driven, including regular review.

Whilst WSC will report to the West Somerset Housing Forum on general progress and joint working with partners, WSC will also report into Somerset Strategic Housing Officers Group in terms of contribution to County level aims and targets, the specifics of the strategy’s action plan must not be lost. Internally WSC has formed a delivery group for the Strategy which comprises those individuals responsible for delivery of actions within the Strategy. This will be chaired by the Group Manager housing and Community and will meet formally bi-monthly to monitor implementation against the action plan, and agree responsibility for remedial action where there are

¹⁵ Community leadership and the strategic housing role in local government, IDeA, 2007 quoting from Sustainable Communities: Homes for All, 2005 ODPM

obstacles to delivery and/or where there is a case for review. This group will in turn report on performance to the Corporate Management Team. Frequency and rigour of this group is critical to ensuring that the Audit Commission are satisfied, and that WSC are better prepared for future inspection (including short notice inspections, KLOE alignment through self assessment, new CAA framework, etc). It will also mean that reports to Corporate Management Team and Cabinet are well informed, consistent and robust.

PRIORITY 9: CONTINUE TO DRIVE FORWARD PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

There have been major changes in the political leadership of the council and a new structure has been introduced as part of a comprehensive improvement programme. Central to the improvement programme is a much sharper focus on performance. Continuing to drive forward performance improvements forms the final priority for the Housing Strategy

Measures of success

- Improved value for money when measured against baseline

What we are already doing to promote a drive forward performance improvement

- West Somerset is a member of the SPARSE grouping of rural local authorities that works to give a voice to local authorities working in rural England and to the people who live there.
- The Audit Commission inspection of strategic housing services made the following recommendations for service improvement.

R1 Improve the approach to customer access and equality and diversity

R2 Improve the quality of the service future plans

R3 Improve the use of the existing housing stock

R4 Improve value for money

R5 Improve performance management arrangements

They have been incorporated in the Corporate Improvement Plan and quarterly progress reports are produced. Most of the recommended improvements have been implemented and the remainder are addressed by this Strategy. Progress is shown in Appendix 5.

- The improvement process is supported by a successful funding bid to the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership and match funding is provided by the Council
- A new policy framework has been approved and will form the basis of the Council's Corporate Plan for 2009-12. This sets out a vision for housing 'to provide access and availability of housing that fits the diverse needs of local people'.
- The evidence base for housing has been vastly improved over the last year through the completion of a number of studies. In Appendix 3 we have pulled together key aspects of the evidence base that have informed the development of this strategy.
- The failure of a Somerset Unitary Authority bid has led to the authorities having to deliver large savings. Pioneer Somerset is a concept of enhanced two tier working being taken forward by the Councils and through which the savings are to be made. Joining forces is one way in which council's are able to deliver services more efficiently. The Gershon efficiency agenda has delivered a behavioural change across local authorities. The pre-budget report now calls for more efficiency savings to support the economy, with these efficiencies coming through lowering the cost of back-office operations. Potential barriers include different governance structures, political agendas and difficulties in finding willing partners
- WSC's ambitions to integrate service delivery are reflected in Priority 2 of the Corporate Improvement Plan and specifically by two activities:
 - Developing a business case for shared management arrangements, building on existing shared service delivery by May 2009
 - Working with key partners to strengthen relationship and to inform the longer-term plan to move to shared management arrangements and integrated service delivery
- A peer review of the current delivery of the strategic housing service across the six Somerset Councils has been completed by the IDeA. The Somerset district strategic housing functions and elements of the county council already work closely and are in a position to be at the forefront of Pioneer Somerset's efficiency agenda. The impetus comes from both a recognition that savings can be made and that better outcomes are possible through a more joined up and strategic approach

What else we will do

Good partnership working across agencies has become increasingly important as the place shaping role has developed. It encompasses collective action by local agencies to deliver the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and the Local Area Agreement which will ideally be closely related. Other strategies should support the delivery of the SCS. For this to work well there needs to be a good understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of the key agencies and partnerships. For West Somerset key relationships include those between the Council, West Somerset Strategic Partnership, Somerset Strategic Partnership, Somerset County Council and Exmoor National Park Authority.

A Strategic Housing Officers Group (SSHOG) comprising Strategic Housing Managers and officers from Somerset County Council planning operates across the five districts. SSHOG provides the operational delivery mechanism. Somerset Strategic Housing Partnership (SSHP) includes elected members from both tiers of councils in Somerset who work collectively to steer SSHOG although SSHP has no delegated decision-making powers.

While SSHOG has been taking forward the strategic housing agenda, it has been doing so without a formal mandate or decision making powers and without a clear articulated vision. Neither SSHOG or SSHP is a true strategic partnership at present. Both groups need to evolve to clarify and sharpen their focus.

The peer review considered that 'the strategic housing agenda needs a stronger sub-regional lead, supported by each authority and with clear understanding of the interplay between housing, planning and economic development and the role each plays in 'place-shaping'. The review recommends that SSHP be expanded to include a wider range of partners.

To begin the process of developing a sub regional Housing Strategy, a Somerset Housing Strategy Pre-consultation draft and a County discussion paper have both been produced. The Housing Strategy pre-consultation document was shared with partners at a Housing Strategy day on the 25th September 2008 and was well received. This was followed by a 'visioning day' on the 26th March 2009 which will inform the process of change.

There is support for and awareness of the benefits of joint working but the district authorities are also keen to ensure that each locality retains its identity of place.

Somerset County Council is showing interest in the strategic housing agenda including putting forward land for housing, supporting delivery of Local Area Agreement housing targets and contributing towards the funding of rural housing enablers.

The LAA includes national indicator 179, which is value for money of on-going cash-releasing value for money gains that have impacted since the start of the 2008-09

financial year. In order to drive further improvements we aim to address the following issues.

- Ensure Audit Commission recommendations for improvement to housing services that are not already complete are reflected in actions in this strategy and a process of continual improvement will be carried forward.
- Involve service users in developing a full suite of service standards for strategic housing services and monitor compliance with the standards
- Build on the 2009/10 service plan for strategic housing services with improvements in 2010/11 and 2011/12.
- Report progress on delivery of the Housing Strategy to the West Somerset Housing Forum at each meeting of the Forum
- Realign housing services within WSC to increase focus on delivering the requirements of the Housing Strategy
- Integration of Strategic Housing Services has been identified as a pioneer project for 2009/10. Pioneer aims to deliver enhanced two tier working across Somerset. We will participate fully in the project to deliver the project outcomes. WSC are acting as lead for the project group with the Group manager being lead officer for the project. The project will aim to:
 - Articulate a clear vision for housing across Somerset.
 - Complete the sub regional Housing Strategy
 - Work with partners across Somerset to establish a value for money baseline covering current service costs and what they currently deliver (as far as possible outcomes rather than outputs)
 - Develop an outline programme for the joint delivery of housing services across Somerset, as part of Pioneer Somerset, with initial estimates relating to time and costs
 - Develop timed and costed proposals to create a shared strategic housing service
 - Develop a robust governance framework and delivery arrangements for the sub regional strategic housing function
 - Widen the Somerset Strategic Housing Partnership to include a range of partners and establish a sub regional 'place shaping' partnership

- The Strategic Housing Service is acting as a pilot for the new Performance Management Framework within WSC. Work is being undertaken with IDeA to develop a template for this purpose.
- Carry out regular review of strategy action plan to build on improvements and ensure continued improvement in the delivery of the strategic Housing service

ACTION PLAN

*Year 1 = 2009/10, Year 2 = 2010/11, Year 3 = 2011/12

Priority 1: Address the housing needs of an ageing population		
Key Actions	Lead	Year 1, 2, 3*
Introduce a banded system of housing support for older people that is tenure neutral and based on need	Somerset Supporting People Team	Year 1
Approach other authorities of a rural character with similarly high proportions of older people to explore opportunities to jointly develop good practice in meeting the housing needs of older people, including investigating the potential for cohousing	West Somerset Housing Forum	Year 1
Agree with partners a comprehensive package of housing advice for older people	Philip Maddocks	Year 1
Develop a strategic framework for meeting older people's housing and support needs in West Somerset	West Somerset Housing Forum	Year 2
Identify priority areas for new provision using a hub and spoke model of extra care housing	Heather Crockford/ Philip Maddocks	Year 2
Complete a review of extra care housing	Somerset Supporting People Team	Year 2
With partners across the district establish what is already known about the potential for the future use of assistive technology with specific reference to telecare, and how it might be utilised in the district	West Somerset Supported Housing Forum	Year 2

Priority 2: Tackle worklessness and address other social investment priorities		
Key Actions	Lead	Year 1, 2, 3
In conjunction with RSL partners, use an instrument such as the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) toolkit: Tackling Worklessness, to plan a strategic approach and implement and evaluate worklessness initiatives	West Somerset Housing Forum/West Somerset Economic Task Force, Employment and Skills Sub Group	Year 1
Develop proposals within the local connections rule of the Choice Based Lettings policy to allow people in work to access affordable housing options	Philip Maddocks	Year 1
Carry out a feasibility study, investigate models and establish the need for a foyer	Stonham Housing Association	Year 1
Establish a task and finish group to investigate ways in which partnership working can improve the effectiveness of work to deliver housing and health priorities	West Somerset Housing Forum	Year 1
Work through Somerset Strategic Housing Officers Group to establish priorities for social investment, identify and replicate good practice and explore funding opportunities	Ian Timms	Year 2
During the life of the strategy we will explore the implications of Hinkley Point	Ian Timms	Years 1, 2 and 3
Introduce a coordinated strategic approach to financial inclusion that establishes consistency in advice given by different agencies and develops links between housing, benefits, training	Philip Maddocks	Year 2

and employment advice		
Establish social investment initiatives	West Somerset Housing Forum	Year 3

Priority 3: Prevent and deal with homelessness and address housing support priorities		
Key Actions	Lead	Year 1, 2, 3
Review best practice and prepare a comprehensive package of advice to help avoid people losing their homes	Philip Maddocks/ West Somerset Housing Forum, West Somerset Advice Bureau, Registered Social Landlord`S	Year 1
Improve support for intentionally homeless households	Philip Maddocks in partnership with other district authorities across Somerset	Year 1
Agree future housing support priorities with Somerset Supporting People team	West Somerset Supported Housing Forum	Year 1
Review existing deposit/bond schemes in order to improve their appeal to private sector landlords	Philip Maddocks in partnership with other district authorities across Somerset	Year 2
Explore the potential of Private Sector Leasing to secure accommodation as settled rather than temporary	Philip Maddocks in partnership with other district authorities across Somerset	Year 2
Improve existing protocols and develop new protocols to aid partnership working	Philip Maddocks in partnership with other district authorities across Somerset	Year 2
Consider options for the future management of the Gypsy and Traveller site a Farrington Hill, Stogursey	Ian Timms	Year 2

Priority 4: Provide the framework for future housing provision		
Key Actions	Lead	Year 1, 2, 3
Explore with Devon County Council and the South West Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP), piloting use of the rural sustainability toolkit for clustering rural areas	Ian Timms	Year 1
<p>Set up a task and finish group to improve understanding of how investment in housing can support future economic success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine the potential for housing activity to contribute to the generation of employment and business growth in West Somerset including activity related to housing development; housing adaptation and care and support needs, including the potential for telecare services for an ageing population; and retrofitting of energy saving measures in existing homes 	West Somerset Council	Year 1
Identify priority areas and priority dwellings for new development, including those dwellings needed to help support the economy	Corinne Matthews/Martin Wilsher	Year 2
Evaluate feasibility for a flagship environmental housing project in Watchet as part of a 'Train and Build' scheme	Martin Wilsher/Heather Crockford	Year 2
Ensure Housing is a key component of the masterplan for the regeneration of Minehead	Corinne Matthews/Martin Wilsher	Year 3

Priority 5: Increase the provision of new affordable housing		
Key Actions	Lead	Year 1, 2, 3
Investigate the possibility of grant funding for developments at Simonsbath and exception sites at Williton and Watchet	West Somerset Affordable Housing Group	Year 1
Complete a delivery strategy for new affordable housing	Heather Crockford	Year 1
With Exmoor National Park Authority, produce a scoping document that considers the potential for future innovative affordable housing solutions on Exmoor giving particular attention to self build and work/live properties	West Somerset Housing Forum	Year 2
Revise the existing Supplementary Planning Guidance to strengthen the requirements relating to affordable housing and in particular the thresholds beyond which affordable housing must be provided	Martin Wilsher/Heather Crockford	Year 2
Formulate a strategy to improve the processes relating to securing, monitoring and enforcing planning obligations	Martin Wilsher/Heather Crockford	Year 2
Complete Community Land Trust development at Carhampton	West Somerset Affordable Housing Group	Year 3

Priority 6: Make best use of existing housing stock		
Key Actions	Lead	Year 1, 2, 3
Consider demand for the 'tenant incentive scheme' and barriers to success	West Somerset Housing Forum	Year 1
An empty homes officer will be appointed. The post will be managed from Sedgemoor and will work across both districts	Chris Trevelyan	Year 1
The first task for the empty homes officer will be to draw together the information that is available relating to empty homes in the area	Empty homes officer	Year 1
The existing Empty Homes strategy will be reviewed and new targets for action agreed. An evaluation of the powers available for bringing empty properties back into use will be completed and a new Empty Homes Strategy for Somerset West will be developed	Empty homes officer	Year 1
A register of empty properties will be compiled that details the location and length of time empty and information and any information available regarding why properties are empty	Empty homes officer	Year 1
The Empty Homes Strategy will identify a basis by which empty homes are prioritised for action to bring them back into use	Empty homes officer	Year 1
Negotiations will be held with Housing Association's operating in the area to consider the scope for partnership working in bringing empty homes back into use	Empty homes officer	Year 2

Priority 7: Encourage good quality accommodation and management		
Key Actions	Lead	Year 1, 2, 3
Prepare a statement to encapsulate how private sector resources are used to support the Housing Strategy across Somerset West	Chris Trevelyan	Year 1
Develop a Somerset West policy for the use of the Regulatory Reform Order	Chris Trevelyan	Year 1
Develop a Somerset West Enforcement Policy	Chris Trevelyan	Year 1
Develop a Home Maintenance Strategy	Chris Trevelyan	Year 1
Complete improvements to the private sector housing information on both WSC and Sedgemoor Council websites, with appropriate links included	Julie Payne	Year 1
Complete the integration of private sector enforcement services across West Somerset and Sedgemoor	Julie Payne	Year 1
Complete eligible HMO licensing across West Somerset and Sedgemoor	Julie Payne	Year 1
Introduce a landlord accreditation system	Chris Trevelyan	Year 1
Produce a joint landlords newsletter for Sedgemoor and West Somerset.	Julie Payne	Year 1

Achieve the decent homes standard across the social rented housing sector	Magna West Somerset and other Housing Association partners	Year 2
Complete a Somerset West Private Sector Housing Strategy	Chris Trevelyan	Year 1
Monitor the situation in relation to direct payments of housing benefit. Make representation to regional and national bodies if there are continuing difficulties	Philip Maddocks	Year 2
Pilot CBL with accredited Private sector landlords	Chris Trevelyan	Year 1
Roll out Choice Based Lettings to private sector landlords		Year 2

Priority 8: Promote energy efficient homes		
Key Actions	Lead	Year 1, 2, 3
Deliver an energy efficiency campaign to reach out to the wider community and promote the benefits of insulation and other energy efficiency measures.	Forum 21	Year 1
Create and recruit to a new post with a remit to address fuel poverty.	Chris Trevelyan/Angela Lamplough	Year 1
Develop a more strategic and targeted approach to fuel poverty. Use Fuel Poverty indicators derived from the census and house condition survey data to identify areas where there is a high risk. This information is to be mapped using GIS.	Chris Trevelyan/Angela Lamplough	Year 2

Work with partner agencies to consider the contribution that new environmental technologies can make to sustainable living solutions and develop a statement relating to their most appropriate current use	Fuel Poverty Officer	Year 2
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Priority 9: Continue to drive forward performance improvement		
Key Actions	Lead	Year 1, 2, 3
Ensure Audit Commission recommendations for improvement to housing services that are not already complete are reflected in actions in this strategy and a process of continual improvement will be carried forward.	Ian Timms	Year 1
Build on the 2009/10-service plan for strategic housing services with improvements in 2010/11 and 2011/12.	Ian Timms	Year 1
Report progress on delivery of the Housing Strategy to the West Somerset Housing Forum at each meeting of the Forum	Ian Timms	Year 1
Realign housing services within WSC to increase focus on delivering the requirements of the Housing Strategy	Ian Timms	Year 1

<p>Complete performance management pilot for the Strategic Housing Service in conjunction with IDeA</p>	<p>Ian Timms</p>	<p>Year 1</p>
<p>Participate and Lead the Pioneer Countywide integration project. The project will aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Articulate a clear vision for housing across Somerset. ○ Complete the sub regional Housing Strategy ○ Work with partners across Somerset to establish a value for money baseline covering current service costs and what they currently deliver (as far as possible outcomes rather than outputs) ○ Develop an outline programme for the joint delivery of housing services across Somerset, as part of Pioneer Somerset, with initial estimates relating to time and costs ○ Develop timed and costed proposals to create a shared strategic housing service ○ Develop a robust governance framework and delivery arrangements for the sub regional strategic housing function ○ Widen the Somerset Strategic Housing Partnership to include a range of partners and establish a sub 	<p>Ian Timms /Somerset Strategic Housing Officers Group</p>	<p>Year 1</p>

regional 'place shaping' partnership		
Carry out regular review of strategy action plan to build on improvements and ensure continued improvement in the delivery of the strategic Housing service	Ian Timms	Year 1,2,3