

ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL CPA SELF ASSESSMENT FOR BALANCING HOUSING MARKETS

1. How well does the Council understand its housing market and from its understanding has the Council developed the right proposals to help balance its housing markets.

The Council seeks to understand its housing market from a variety of information sources which identify the key indicators of housing need in the District.

The Council has principally relied on an independent housing needs study which was conducted in 1999 which included:-

- A postal survey of 4,500 households in the District.
- A face-to-face interview survey of 500 households.
- A local house prices and income survey using the Halifax house price index database.
- A survey of population and household projections to the year 2011.

The most important issues identified in the survey were the problem of affordability for low income households and the level of concealed households who could not afford to be in the market; the need for smaller and affordable types of housing particularly one and two bedroom flats and terraced houses, which are under-represented in the existing stock; the need to address the under provision of adapted dwellings for households containing a disabled person and the need to address the housing, care and support needs of an increasing elderly population.

The Council recognises the need to undertake a new housing needs study and resources are being made available to commission a new study in 2004. The specification will be based on the ODPM's "Local Housing Needs Assessment – a Guide to Good Practice"

To supplement the findings of the existing study the Council continues to use information to identify housing need from its homelessness and housing advice enquiries; its housing register which is reviewed on an annual basis and its joint transfer list held with six RSL's in the District.

In respect of supported housing needs the Council holds annual discussions with local Social Services teams. It uses the Essex-wide supported housing needs index and information from needs and supply analysis from its Local Supporting People statement.

The District has one of the highest levels of owner-occupation in the country at nearly 90%, so the private sector clearly has the greatest potential to meet the housing needs of the District. The Council uses powers including planning controls, housing defects enforcement action and financial incentives to influence the private housing market, but with such high levels of owner-occupation and limited resources bringing about significant change is difficult. The Housing Needs Survey showed that the vast majority of the residents are satisfied with their housing and the Council supports the principle that most people will use their own resources to look after and improve their own properties.

The Council commissioned a private sector stock condition survey and is in the process of evaluating the recently received results, which will inform the development of its private sector renewal policy and ongoing strategy.

The Council has participated in discussions with the Thames Gateway South Essex housing authorities in the drafting of a Sub Regional housing strategy and is awaiting the outcome of Independent research commissioned by the Housing Corporation into sub regional affordable housing needs, which includes a study on key worker housing provision.

The Council has also participated in an Essex-wide research project which looked at the housing needs of Black and Minority Ethnic groups and is presently evaluating the conclusions with regard to the effect it will have on Rochford's housing.

Over a number of years between 1998 and 2001, the Council held annual housing forums involving the community, partners and key stakeholders in the formation of its housing strategy. It is presently consulting on its draft housing strategy (2004-2007) which has been submitted to ODPM to achieve 'fit for purpose' status. The draft housing strategy takes account of national regional and local strategies.

This authority has taken a strategic role in local housing markets by separating its landlord role from other housing functions it has produced a detailed Business Plan for its own stock. It will complete a stock option appraisal by the end of 2004 to consider future ownership and management of its stock. In recognition of the Sustainable Communities Plan, the Council has embraced a number of the key areas which includes the Replacement Local Plan and the new style Local Development Document (LDD). The Replacement Local Plan will proceed through to adoption but detailed work will continue in 2004/05 to enable the LDD to be published in good time within the proposed three-year conversion period.

Through its enabling role the Council has embarked on a challenging programme to provide a range of affordable/supported housing in the District through partner RSL's. Capital funding of £2.9 million has been approved by the Housing Corporation under the Approved Development Programme for 2003/04 to help address the imbalance of supply in the housing market. A number of the proposed developments have been the subject of full public consultation meetings where local residents have been able to air their views and comments. These will be fed back into the development proposals by the end of 2003 before any formal applications for planning approval are considered. Some of the schemes are dependent on revenue funding decisions through the Supporting People (SP) framework, but if they all proceed, 101 units of affordable and supported housing will be produced.

The proposals contained within its Housing Strategy and Replacement Local Plan will help deliver solutions to address the imbalance of the market as identified in the Council housing needs study and provide a range of affordable and supported housing in the District.

The Council has commissioned a study to consider the needs of the growing elderly population in the District and the Phase 1 and 2 reports have been considered by Members. The development of an older persons strategy to address their housing, care and support needs is programmed to be completed by April 2004.

Through an RSL partner the Council intends to build a brand new 30 unit extra care housing scheme to address the housing, care and support needs of the growing frail elderly population of the district. In conjunction with this development the RSL will refurbish an outmoded council owned traditional sheltered scheme to provide a mix of 1 and 2 bedroom units to cater for those who require general needs housing, including key workers. The scheme is dependent on SP funding which is due to be announced in January 2004.

Following the identification of a Council owned infill site in Rochford, the Council sought RSL proposals to provide a development which includes adapted housing to address the under supply of properties for the physically disabled. The Council's contribution to the development will be to transfer the land to its partner RSL at nil cost.

The identification of a number of further vacant infill sites owned by the Council has enabled the development of Approved Development Programme bids for several schemes. These include supported housing for people with learning disabilities, people escaping domestic violence, move-on accommodation and young people who may be vulnerable.

Five properties for shared ownership are being developed through a Section 106 Agreement to help satisfy the needs of newly forming households who require affordable housing but are at the margin of ownership. This particular group were identified as requiring affordable housing in the Housing Needs Study 1999.

2. What are the Council's actions and what outcomes has it achieved in helping to balance housing markets.

The Council works corporately to help balance the housing market. It has in the past made funds available through Local Authority Social Housing Grant to support housing provision in the District through RSL's. Of particular significance was the award of £375,000 grant to a partner RSL to provide additional temporary accommodation for the homeless. An additional 11 units of stock were provided by the RSL in order to reduce the numbers of homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation. A further £120,000 was provided to support 3 purchases by a partner RSL to further boost the stock of temporary accommodation.

Council owned land which is surplus to requirements has been made available at nil cost for RSL housing proposals and Housing Corporation Capital funding approved which will enable these schemes to be developed and which will assist in delivery a number of Housing Strategy objectives, including the provision of an extra care scheme, general needs and supported housing.

The Council has developed an IT strategy and uses spreadsheets to monitor the investment needed and available to deliver affordable housing schemes and other priority projects.

Planning and housing divisions work together to deliver affordable housing and have recently negotiated a Section 106 Agreement to deliver 5 shared ownership units on a private housing development. A further agreement to deliver a minimum of 24 affordable homes on another development will be agreed soon, together with one acre of housing for key workers on a third development site.

The Council works closely with its three main RSL partners in discussing proposals for housing development in the District to achieve the strategic housing aims of the Council and has consulted with its RSL partners to engage them in open competition when sites for development become available.

The Council has worked closely with a neighbouring authority, Castle Point Borough Council, to deliver a cross boundary housing scheme through a local RSL which will enable the Council to have nomination rights to five general needs properties

Through its Local Supporting People Statement, the Council has identified a demand for supported accommodation for various client groups, and has worked with its RSL partners and other agencies in developing a number of housing schemes for people with learning disabilities, single people, young mothers, young people leaving care and people fleeing domestic violence.

The Council has policies to ensure it makes provision for sufficient housing to meet the requirements of the Essex and Southend-on-Sea Replacement Structure Plan and to deliver a mix of housing types and tenures that best meet the needs of the District 's population.

Housing and land supply are closely monitored and the local plan explains the action to be taken if the allocations are not being achieved. There is limited supply of brownfield sites available in the District but an urban capacity study has identified areas where housing development might be possible.

The Council always considers sustainable residential environments and tries to balance environmental, economic and social needs. A key element of the Replacement Local Plan is a focus on sustainability.

The Council has developed a mix of supported housing schemes through a partner RSL which meets the needs of a range of vulnerable people within the District and has developed strong partnerships with other agencies including Social Services and health who provide support services.

The Council has been successful in implementing the Supporting People locally and played a full role in the implementation process, including the appointment of a local SP officer with a neighbouring Local Authority. The Council has a Member representative on the Supporting People Commissioning Body for Essex and the Chief Executive is one of the two Essex Chief Executive representatives on the Chief Officers Steering Group.

The Council has produced a Homelessness Strategy to deadline which includes actions to tackle the key issues relating to homelessness within the District. This includes the reduction of Bed/Breakfast through use of its own stock and working with a partner RSL to provide additional temporary accommodation.

The Council recognises that the private sector has the greatest potential to meet the housing needs of the District and its aim is to ensure that privately owned dwellings are safe, secure and in good condition with adequate space and amenities, to provide help to those are unable to look after their homes and to minimise the number of empty homes. An Empty Homes Strategy is being developed by May 2004 and the Private Sector Strategy is to be updated once the Stock Condition Survey has been fully analysed. A new Rochford Home Maintenance and Adaptation Grant has been implemented from July 2003 to replace the discretionary grants which ceased with the implementation of the Regulatory Reform Order. The new grant is designed to assist groups identified as particularly likely to be in need of help to repair or adapt their homes.

3. How well does the Council monitor its progress and impact in helping to balance housing markets and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?

The Council ensures that housing provision is closely monitored and an enhanced monitoring programme is being introduced in 2004 in conjunction with the Replacement Local Plan.

The Council is developing a five year financial strategy which links with other strategies and plans such as the Capital Programme and Asset Management Plan.

Members view a sample of completed development schemes and the Council operates a design award scheme.

The draft Housing Strategy (2004-2007) has an associated action plan which will be updated and reported to Council at six-monthly intervals.

Housing needs information will be updated at least annually in future by a combination of use of internal information from housing completions, lettings, homelessness etc, and every other year by external sources such as national house price and supply indicators.

The Council ensures that its Housing Strategy and Action Plan updates and new draft Housing Strategy is circulated to partners.

Senior Officers attend the Essex Housing Officers Group and other specialist meetings to share good practice.

The Council has met with a high performing Authority in Essex to share best practice in the development of its draft Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan. The Council saw this as an opportunity to learn from a best practice authority who had achieved "fit for purpose" status.