
REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE - 26 NOVEMBER 2008

PORTFOLIO: COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION, BENEFITS AND STRATEGIC HOUSING

REPORT FROM THE HEAD OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF THE ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL HOUSING STRATEGY 2008 - 2011

1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 That Members approve the content of the draft Housing Strategy 2008-2011, attached as Appendix A to this report, and agree for it to be put out for final consultation.

2 FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE No: 19/08

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 At the meeting of the Executive on 5 November, Members endorsed the Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Sub Regional Housing Strategy 2008- 2011 that had both been produced in partnership with the other four TGSE Local Authorities.
- 3.2 The Council's own Local Housing Strategy identifies how the themes of the Sub Regional Strategy, ie, managing future growth, meeting the needs of vulnerable people and investing in the housing stock, are to be delivered at District level.

4 KEY POINTS

Managing Future Growth

- 4.1 Partnership working with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), particularly Rochford Housing Association, and with other authorities and agencies through the Local Area Agreement (LAA), will be essential in meeting the need for affordable housing. The proposed change to planning policy through the Local Development Framework (LDF) process will increase the amount of affordable housing secured through S106 agreements.
- 4.2 As Members will already be aware, a Choice Based Lettings scheme is currently being developed for implementation before April 2010 and this is also involving working with our TGSE partners.
- 4.3 Homebuy and other Government initiatives will be promoted to help people into home ownership where they would not otherwise be able to purchase a home.

Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Groups

- 4.4 Measures to increase homelessness prevention and to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation will be developed.
- 4.5 Work will continue to identify and address the housing needs of vulnerable groups, particularly those with mental health problems and this will involve liaising with Essex County Council (ECC) and other agencies.
- 4.6 The Council will support a Housing Private Finance Initiative bid by ECC for a scheme to provide better housing options for vulnerable adults in Essex called '*Getting Personal*'. The proposal is to deliver 6 x 60 unit extra care schemes for older people and 12 x 8 clusters of supported housing for those with mental health needs, learning disabilities, fleeing domestic violence, drug and alcohol problems, physical or sensory impairment and for children leaving care. The PFI credit required is £110 million with partner Authorities contributing land and/or finance.
- 4.7 The issue of Gypsy and Traveller pitches will be addressed and additional pitches will need to be provided. This has also been addressed in the emerging LDF Core Strategy.

Investing in the Stock

- 4.8 The number of non decent dwellings occupied by vulnerable people will be reduced by providing financial assistance through the Council's grant scheme and through the development of the sub regional Decent Warm Healthy Homes scheme. Subject to Ministerial approval, £4.3 million has been secured for this scheme, however the sub regional authorities will be required to contribute to the set-up costs.
- 4.9 Support will continue to be provided for the Handyperson and Gardening Services which, Members will already be aware, has increased over the last few years.
- 4.10 The number of empty homes will be reduced through the development of an Empty Homes Strategy and through the sub regional Empty Property – Direct Assistance Scheme. This scheme, for which £1.5 million has been granted subject to Ministerial approval, aims to bring 60 empty homes back into use across the sub region. Financial assistance by way of recoverable grant will be used to renovate the properties in order to secure lettings to vulnerable groups for an agreed period.
- 4.11 At least 350 properties will be provided with home energy efficiency measures through the promotion of schemes such as Warm Front and the British Gas Council Tax Rebate Scheme and the provision of Warm Front top-up grants.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The continued funding of the Handyperson / Gardening schemes can be met from existing budgets, and similarly, the DFG and RHMA grant schemes are included in the current capital programme.
- 5.2 With regard to Choice Based Lettings, there is a budget bid of £20,000 plus £4,000 per annum maintenance as part of the budget setting process for 2009/10.
- 5.3 The Council's contribution to the ECC PFI bid for the 'Getting Personal' scheme is estimated at £35,000, which it is proposed to allocate from existing S106 funds.
- 5.4 The Council's contribution to the sub regional Decent Warm Healthy Homes scheme is estimated at £40,000 over two years. A bid for £20,000 has therefore been included as part of the budget setting process for 2009/10

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

SMT Lead Officer Signature: _____

HEAD OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Background Papers:-

None.

For further information please contact Jeremy Bourne on:-

Tel:- 01702 318163

E-Mail:- Jeremy.bourne@rochford.gov.uk

If you would like this report in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.

Rochford District Council's Housing Strategy 2008 – 2011 (DRAFT 10/11/08)

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FORWARD

This strategy sets out how the Council is going to meet housing need in the District for the next three years. It assesses our priorities for housing and looks at the ways in which these are to be achieved. However, we realise that in addressing our housing need problems we need to do more than build new homes. We need to maximise the efficient use of the all of the housing stock, including the private sector, tackle homelessness, meet the needs of vulnerable people whilst at the same time improving the life for everyone in our District.

Rochford District forms part of the Thames Gateway regeneration area. It is situated in south east Essex, within a peninsula between the rivers Thames and Crouch with the North Sea to the east. The District has land boundaries with Basildon District, Southend-on-Sea and Castle Point Borough Councils. It also has marine boundaries with Maldon and Chelmsford Districts. It has transport linkages to the M25, the A127 and A13 with direct rail links into London. London Southend Airport straddles the District's southern boundary with Southend-on-Sea. Much of the District's 65 square miles is designated as green belt with many miles of coastline and nationally important areas of salt marsh. Foulness Island and some adjoining areas in the east of the District are under Ministry of Defence control.

The District is predominately rural with three towns Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley with a number of smaller areas. Approximately 85% of the Rochford District is green belt. Rochford's population is estimated to be around 81,300 people which is expected to increase to around 87,000 by 2021. It is forecast that by 2021 the number of residents aged 85 years and over will approximately double which would represent some 3.3% of the District's population.

The area of Rochford is generally a prosperous part of the country which is reflected in relatively low deprivation and being 316th least deprived out of 354 districts. However, at ward and sub ward levels there are pockets of deprivation with one Super Output Area in the top 10% most income deprived in the country. Life expectancy is generally high in the District between 75 years and 86 years however there are considerable variations at ward level.

Owner occupation within the District constitutes around 86% of households which is amongst the highest in the country. House prices in the District are relatively high with an average house price of £254,000(2007).

2. INTRODUCTION

We produced our “Fit for Purpose” Housing Strategy in 2004 which covered the period from 2004 to 2007. Many of the priorities set out in this document were successfully achieved however a number of actions are still ongoing and are incorporated into this revised and updated strategy.

Through this new and revised strategy we aim to:

- Work closely with Rochford Housing Association (RHA) to provide at least 50 new affordable homes each year
- Work in partnership with RSLs to find new and innovative ways of meeting the local demand and need for a range of affordable homes
- Produce a Private Sector Housing Strategy
- Maximise the use of private sector housing stock through an Empty Homes Strategy
- Increase the housing opportunities for vulnerable groups
- Improve our Housing Options and Advice service with the aim of reducing the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation
- Introduce Choice Based Lettings
- Continue to work with our sub regional local authority partners in meeting the housing needs of those living in the sub region

Achievements of our Housing Strategy 2004-2007

The following actions are an illustration of some of our achievements that we successfully completed.

- Following the Council’s Stock Options Appraisal which looked at how the Council would meet the Decent Homes Standard for its homes a decision was made to transfer the stock to a registered social landlord. In September 2007 Rochford District Council transferred all of its housing stock to Rochford Housing Association (RHA).
- Delivery of new affordable homes funded through the Housing Corporation’s Approved Development Programme and the National Affordable Housing Programme
 - ❖ 27 one and two bedroom flats homes for social rent and key worker intermediate rent on the site of a former nursery in partnership with Swan Housing Association
 - ❖ the refurbishment of 28 bedsits and flats for older people into 22 one and two bedroom flats for social rent and key worker intermediate rent in partnership with Swan Housing Association
 - ❖ second stage refuge for people escaping domestic violence comprising of 5 flats in partnership with Swan Housing Association
 - ❖ 2 one bedroom flats for move on accommodation in partnership with Swan Housing Association
 - ❖ 2 flats for people with learning disabilities and shared 3 person accommodation in partnership with Swan Housing Association

- ❖ 42 one and two bedroom flats for social rent in partnership with Swan and Springboard Housing Associations
- ❖ 4 one and two bedroom wheelchair adapted bungalows for social rent in partnership with Swan Housing Association
- ❖ an Extracare scheme comprising of 30 one and two bedroom flats in partnership with Swan Housing Association
- Purchase of 2 two bedroom and 2 one bedroom flats for social rent by Estuary Housing Association with financial support from Rochford District Council
- Refurbished a hostel used as temporary accommodation for homeless families from 10 flats with shared facilities to 6 self contained flats
- Increased the take-up of Disabled Facilities Grants
- Increased awareness of Energy Efficiency Schemes in the District
- Promotion of Rochford's Home Maintenance and Adaptation Grant
- Reduction in the time taken to decide homeless applications
- Established a Handyperson Scheme and Gardening Service delivered through Springboard Home Improvement Agency
- Secured 6 two bedroom flats for shared ownership in partnership with Circle Anglia
- Secured 42 one and two bedroom flats for discount sale for key workers under a Section 106 agreement

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT FOR HOUSING

National Context

The National context for housing is largely driven by Government policy which covers a range of related issues. The Government Department Communities and Local Government (CLG) sets priorities for housing which local authorities must deliver.

Over recent years the Government has published a number of key policy documents which have changed the direction of housing policy, housing delivery and introduced the concept of sustainable communities.

The Sustainable Communities Plan was published in 2003. It set out major reforms in housing and planning and a new approach on how new homes are built and what type of homes. It prioritised the provision of more affordable housing for low income households and key workers, a commitment to bring council and private homes for vulnerable people up to a decent standard and the introduction of a regional approach to housing policy.

In 2005 the 'Sustainable Communities: Homes for All – a Five Year Plan' and Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity was published. The Homes for All outlined the Government's next phase of the Sustainable Communities Plan published in 2003.

The Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' published in 2006 reinforced the local authority role as strategic leader and 'place shaper'. The expectation was that local authorities would take a much stronger strategic lead for their areas which in turn supports the wider community strategy.

The Green Paper 'Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable' published in July 2007, set out the Government's plans for delivering 3 million new additional homes by 2020. It set out how the Government is going to meet the need for social rented homes, tackle housing affordability and support quality and sustainability. It also proposed new opportunities for local authorities to build and manage new homes through the formation of 'Local Housing Companies'.

The Housing Regeneration Act 2008 followed which endorsed the merger of the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships to create the new Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The new agency's role is seen as a "one-stop" delivery partner for local authorities and one of supporting them to plan and shape sustainable communities. The HCA will have a role in helping to meet the Government's housing target of 3 million new homes and is expected to ensure that infrastructure is provided in areas of new housing development.

In August 2008 the Government announced that it would publish a housing reform green paper towards the end of the year. The green paper will set out proposals to provided housing services and options which help and encourage people towards greater economic independence and social mobility.

Not only has housing policy changed over recent years the planning system has also seen a number of changes. Changes were introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 which saw the replacement of local plans with Local Development Frameworks (LDF). Under this new regime local authorities have to prepare Local Development Documents (LDDs).

In 2006 the Government published 'Planning Policy Statement 3' (PPS3) Housing. In relation to housing provision, this guidance strengthened the Council's opportunities to secure affordable housing provision as part of private housing development, through the use of the planning system.

Regional Context

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) called the East of England Plan was published in May 2008 and sets out the regional strategy for planning and development in the East of England to the year 2021. The Plan has a key role in contributing to the sustainable development of the region. It sets out policies which address the needs of the region and key sub regions. These policies provide a development framework for the next 15 to 20 years that will influence the quality of life, the character of places and how they function, and informs other strategies and plans.

Essex Thames Gateway is defined as a Priority Area for regeneration and a Regionally Strategic Employment Location. The Plan seeks to achieve a balance of employment and housing growth and sets out targets for both. It has a target for at least 452,000 net additional jobs across the region over the 2001-21 plan period of which the target for Essex Thames Gateway is 55,000. The district level for Rochford is 3,000. The Secretary of State has set minimum targets for housing provision which should be exceeded where possible without breaching environmental or infrastructure constraints. A regional target to deliver 508,000 dwellings over the 2001-21 plan period has been established. The minimum provision figure for Rochford is 4,600 dwellings.

Whilst the East of England Plan has established the broad strategic location of where new housing should be developed the Regional Housing Strategy (RHS) provides guidance on the type of housing to be provided. It sets out the strategic direction for the delivery of housing in the East of England - helping to meet the challenges of growth and regeneration in the Region, and more specifically to inform the recommendations for public investment in affordable housing. The primary function of the RHS is to act as an instrument for delivery of the Plan and to support the Regional Economic Strategy which sets the long term vision for the sustainable economic development of the East of England.

The vision of the RHS is 'To ensure everyone can live in a decent home which meets their needs, at a price they can afford and in locations that are sustainable'. The strategy seeks to deliver a sustainable mix of housing by focusing on a number of key mechanisms to support delivery of affordable housing.

Sub Regional Context

Rochford District Council is one of 5 local authority partners that make up the Thames Gateway South Essex (TGSE) Sub Region. Our other sub regional partners are Basildon District Council, Castle Point Borough Council, Thurrock Council and Southend-On-Sea Borough Council.

In 2001 the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership published its 'Vision for the Future' that set out the major aims and objectives for the regeneration and creation of sustainable communities in South Essex. The document that followed 'Delivering the Future' set out the proposals by which that vision could be delivered.

The TGSE has recently published its Sub Regional Housing Strategy for 2008-2011. The overall aims of the strategy are to improve the quality and choice of housing in the sub region and influence the new supply of affordable and social rented housing, intermediate and key worker housing, housing for people with special needs and the renewal of private sector housing. As a key partner in the TGSE Rochford has played a determinative role in the production of the strategy and will be instrumental in realising its key priorities.

Investment in new affordable housing is provided through the National Affordable Housing Programme and is allocated by the Housing Corporation. Of the total allocation of £711 million, the TGSE sub region will receive in the region of £69.7 million equating to 9.80% of the total allocation for the period 2008 – 2011.

In October 2008 a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was completed for the TGSE sub region. The SHMA provides a detailed sub regional market analysis of housing demand and housing need, and identifies the key drivers for the sub region. In addition it provides an evidence base for current and future housing requirements. This assessment updates the District's information on housing needs previously documented in the Housing Needs Survey of 2004. The research has been used to inform our local housing strategy and will be referenced for any future local policies.

Local Context

The Council works closely with the Rochford Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in realising its vision so that it becomes 'the place of choice in the County to live, work and visit'. This Housing Strategy is fundamental to the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy and its four priority areas. These are:

- Supporting the ageing population
- Fostering greater Community cohesion
- Strengthening the Third Sector
- Increasing accessibility to services

The LSP contributes to the Essex County Local Area Agreement (LAA) which delivers these priorities. A new LAA has recently been agreed which contains some targets relating to housing. The Council will have a vital role to play in ensuring that these targets are met.

Work has commenced on the producing the Rochford Local Development Framework (LDF). This sets out how the planning system will shape the Rochford District up to, and in some circumstances, beyond the year 2021.

The Council's Corporate Plan 2008 – 2013 sets out 6 corporate aims to achieve its vision for the District which are as follows:

- Provide quality, cost effective services
- Work towards a safer and more caring community
- Provide a green and sustainable environment
- Encourage a thriving local economy
- Improve the quality of life for people in our district
- Maintain and enhance our local heritage

In ensuring that there are clear links between the Community Strategy, the Corporate Plan and cascading down to Divisional Plans and Staff Personal Development Reviews, the Council has a performance management framework in place.

In March 2008 the Council produced its Vision to Reality 2008 document. This set out how we would achieve our corporate aims up to 2021 and set out the following objectives:

I Work towards a safer and more caring community

- By 2021
 1. Ensure a number of housing alternatives are in place to cater for the growth in the elderly population with a range of packages of care and support on offer
 2. Through the Council's Local Development Framework, ensure that the future development of the District up to 2021 is planned and carried out in a sustainable fashion

II Provide a green and sustainable environment

- By 2017
Through the planning process, to have secured many examples of high quality designed homes, that include water recycling and renewable energy features

III Encourage a thriving local economy

- By 2021
Achieve the relocation of poorly sited industrial estates away from housing areas

IV Improve the quality of life for people in our District

- By 2013
Secure the delivery of at least 50 affordable housing units per year by Rochford Housing Association
- By 2017
Secure a range of new mixed housing development on sites linked to local infrastructure upgrades and connected to public open space

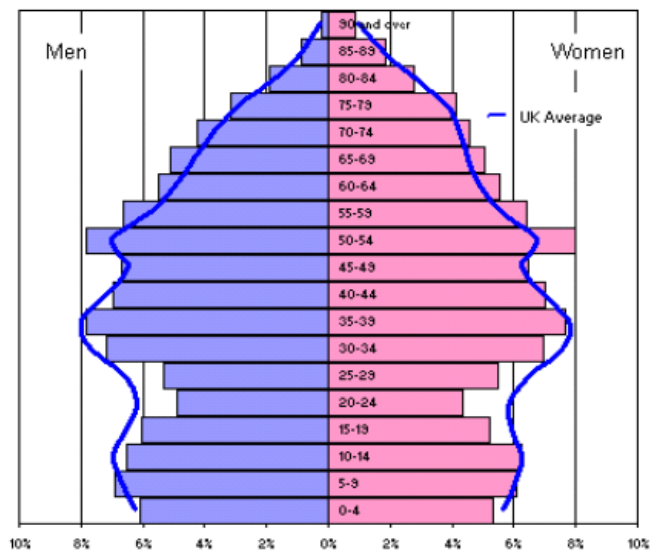
We will continue to work in partnership with our RSL partners on providing new homes in the District, working together on new initiatives and the management of existing stock.

4. HOUSING MARKET KEY CHARACTERISTICS AND DRIVERS

Population

Demographic dynamics are a key driver of change in the housing market, they are an important influence on housing demand, both now and in the future. The population of the District is anticipated to grow over the coming years. The Office for National Statistics has projected the population figures for the District based on mid 2004 population estimates and anticipated trends in births, deaths and migration. These projections estimated that in 2007 the population of the District was 81,300 and is anticipated to increase to 87,000 by 2021.

Population growth in Rochford is low relative to Essex as a whole but is still above the national average. The population of Rochford increased by 5.3 per cent between 1991 and 2005 ranking Rochford 210th out of 408 districts in Great Britain for population growth.



Rochford District Council LDF Annual Monitoring Report 2006-2007

The above population pyramid shows a narrow base and a relatively wide top indicating an ageing population. The District has a higher proportion of older people than regional and national averages and relatively fewer young people. The population of the District is projected to continue to age for the foreseeable future with the number of those aged 0 to 19 decreasing and the population of the 20 to 64 cohort remaining relatively stable. 27% of all households in the District are pensioners. It is estimated that the figure for those over the age of 85 is set to double by 2021.

The increase in the population of older people will obviously have a strong effect on the profile demand of housing. As detailed in the SHMA, the majority of household growth to 2026 is expected to be from single person households. With the increase in population of older people a high proportion of housing demand will come from those of pensionable age.

Household Composition

The average household size in Rochford in 2001 was 2.46 people which is above average. The District is ranked 208th out of 408 districts in the Country (where 1st has the largest household size). Sub regionally Rochford has a lower share of one person households but has a larger number of married couples and pensioner households.

Household Composition

	All Households	Married	Cohabiting Couples	Lone Parent	Other Multi-Person	One Person	All Households with Dependents	Pensioner Households
Rochford	31,952	45%	8%	7%	4%	25%	30%	27%
TGSE	265,902	38%	9%	9%	5%	29%	30%	25%

Source: Census 2001

Socio-Economic Composition

The occupational profile of Rochford is a useful indicator of the District's progress towards developing a diverse, prosperous, knowledge-based economy. The District has high levels of professional occupations and above average levels of managers and senior officials with above average levels of people employed in personal services. There is a high level of wealthy achievers, 36%, which can be associated with executive housing found in the District.

The table below shows average gross annual workplace-based earnings in 2007 for full-time workers. It indicates that Rochford's performance is relatively consistent with the regional and national picture.

Average Gross Annual Earnings for full time workers (2007)

Area	Average Gross Annual Earnings
Rochford	£24,009
East of England	£24,000
Essex CC	£24,613
Great Britain	£24,091

Source: ASHE 2007

Rochford's economic performance is mixed. By national standards, its productivity and business enterprise stand out as particular strengths. The District faces strong local competition in Essex. It has a relatively small economy which has experienced a slow growth over recent years.

There were approximately 19,000 jobs in the District in 2006. Employment growth over the last 10 years has been strongest in education, health and other community and service activities. Although the number of employed has increased by 3.9% over the period of 2001-2006 other areas in the TGSE have experienced a significant higher growth than Rochford.

London Southend Airport is a major employer in the TGSE employing some 1,300 people. It plays a significant role in Rochford's economy. The Airport is identified

within the East Of England plan as a potential catalyst for economic development. As such, Rochford District and Southend-on-Sea Borough Councils are working together to develop a strategy for the future of the airport. A number of options are currently being considered, including expansion. Any expansion will have an effect on the economy of the District and will provide a number of opportunities for the sub region as a whole.

Rochford is considered to be reasonably affluent. It is the least deprived local authority in the TGSE and is ranked in the best 15% nationally for overall affluence. However, there are a few small pockets of affluence mainly found in the more rural parts of the District.

Health

Regionally Rochford has the longest life expectancy of 80.3 years but there are considerable variations at ward level. There are health inequalities in the District by location, gender and level of deprivation. Ashingdon, Canewdon and the Rochford wards contain some of the most deprived areas in the District. Men and women from these wards have around 3 years shorter life expectancies compared to those in the more affluent areas.

Rochford is one of 3 regional local authorities where all the wards have adult obesity rates lower than the England average. Rochford is the ward with the highest obesity rate of 21.2% compared with Hockley ward which has the lowest rate of 17.3%.

Migration

Population growth in Rochford is low relative to Essex and the East of England but still above the national average. Rochford experiences low levels of net-migration. However, there is a notable volume of flows to/from Southend to the District particularly Rochford and Rayleigh with additional movements to the District's rural and coastal areas.

Ethnicity

Rochford has a low proportion of Non-White residents in comparison to other areas of Essex. The table below shows that the District has a small Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community of just over 1.5% of the total population.

Ethnicity

	% White	% Mixed	% Asian or Asian British	% Black or Black British	% Chinese or Other
Rochford	98.2	0.6	0.5	0.2	0.4
TGSE	96.6	0.8	1.3	0.6	0.5

Source: Local knowledge, Census 2001

However, the ethnic profile of the District is likely to have changed since 2001. Experimental estimates for mid 2005 produced by the Office for National Statistics suggest that the BME population in the District has grown to 3.5%.

The Housing Market in Rochford

Tenure Profile

There are over 34,000 properties in Rochford, 91% of these are in the private sector (owner occupied and private rented) and 9% are in the social housing sector. The chart below details the tenure profile.

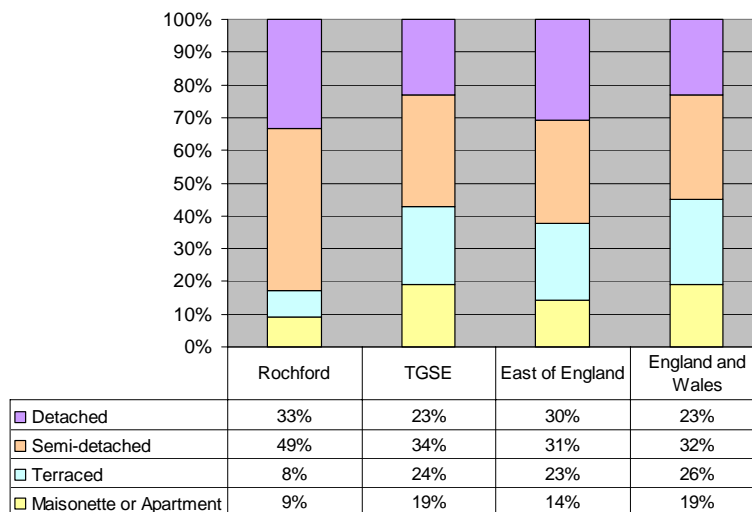
Tenure Profile as at April 2008

Public Sector	Private Sector	Total
2,960	31,235	34,195

Source: Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA) 2008

Rochford has a high proportion of detached and semi detached houses and a large number of 4 bedroom properties which is reflected in the high level of "wealthy achievers" and "established families". Half of the housing stock in the District (49%) is semi detached with a further third detached (33%). The District suffers from a shortage of flats meaning it has a problem attracting young people looking to buy a home.

Housing Type Profile



Source: Census 2001

Affordability

The economy and the housing market are closely linked. There is also a relationship between the economic structure and earnings which will impact upon affordability.

Over recent years there has been a consistent upward trend in house prices across the country. This has been supported by long periods of low interest rates.

Following this period of sustained growth and price rises, the housing market is experiencing significant challenges as a result of turbulence in the global financial markets. House prices have fallen and people are finding it harder to find a suitable mortgage. However, with house price falls, the vast majority of houses are still worth more than when they were bought. For the majority of first time buyers this current

situation combined with the higher cost of borrowing and bigger deposits required means that they will still find it difficult to gain a foot on the property ladder.

Information from the Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) shows that the District has the highest entry-level (lower quartile) house prices. Consistently between 1996 and 2006 compared to the local, regional and national estimates, Rochford had the highest house prices in the cheapest house price bracket (ie up to £200,000). At 2007 the average entry level housing cost was £179,000 which was greater than the average entry level house price for Essex (£158,000) and the East of England price (£142,000). This means that the District is the least affordable for people wanting to buy houses at the lower end of the market. In terms of ratios of median quartile house prices to income, Rochford has median house prices about 9 times higher than average incomes and thus making this area of the TGSE least affordable for this price range.

The table below shows the average house price by type for the District.

Average House Price by Type Q4 2007

	Detached	Semi- detached	Terraced	Flat /maisonette	Overall
Rochford	£366,139	£222,352	£207,811	£151,488	£254,000

Source: HM Land registry

Research carried out to support the SHMA indicates that properties of c£300,000 in value tend to be the cut off point for buyers in the area. Agents in Hockley and Rayleigh reported significant interest from people seeking to relocate from London with affordability being the main reason. With good transport links in the area, this is a major factor for people relocating to the District.

For first time buyers 2 bedroom properties are the most popular type to purchase. However, recently due to the current situation of the housing market, there is an absence of first time buyers which has created a void in the marketplace.

Information from the sub regional SHMA looks at entry-level costs for access to the private market. It assesses those households who cannot afford either to purchase a home or to pay private sector rents without financial support. Calculations have assumed that rental costs will not exceed 25% of gross income and that households purchasing housing will be able to get a mortgage of 3 times their gross income with a 10% deposit. The following table gives examples of housing costs and the corresponding incomes needed to access 2 and 3 bedroom properties.

Entry-level Housing Costs

	Monthly Rent 2006/7	Lowest Decile Price 2006	Income Required to Rent	Income Required to Buy
Rochford	£671	£142,700	£32,224	£42,810

Source: HM Land Registry, Dataspring

The private rented sector is playing an increasingly important role in the District's housing market. Tenant demand in the private rented sector stands at its highest level for five years. Information from the SHMA shows that for example, in Rayleigh,

although there is a (short term) increase in demand for rented properties there is a shortage of properties to fulfil it.

The table below shows average private sector rents for a variety of properties in the District.

Average Rental Prices

1 Bed Flat	2 Bed Flat	2 Bed House	3 Bed House	4 Bed House
£518.75	£650.00	£743.75	£843.75	£1,018.25

Source: Residential Letting Agents in the District (July 2008)

5. Managing Future Growth

Demand for Housing

The inability of some local people and key workers to access good quality housing that they can afford presents a challenge to the Council. The SHMA estimates that the level of need for affordable housing in the District represents 52% of anticipated levels of house building from 2006-2021. It recommends an 80:20 split of affordable housing between social rented and intermediate housing provision. A net annual need of 131 affordable homes has been estimated.

Demand for affordable housing is greatest for larger properties with three and four bedrooms reflecting the limited supply of such properties and the lower rates of turnover. The table below, which is taken from the SHMA, shows the suggested percentages of affordable housing.

Indicative Affordable Housing Provision by Bedroom Size

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4+bed
Rochford	25%	30%	35%	10%

Source: SHMA 2008

Intermediate Housing

Research carried out by Steve Wilcox for Hometrack 2007 identifies two definitions of the intermediate housing market. The first describes those working households who can afford social housing rent without Housing Benefit but cannot afford to buy at the lowest decile point of house prices for 2 and 3 bedroom homes. This is termed the 'narrow' intermediate housing market. The second is the 'broad' or 'total' intermediate housing market which includes those households who are in work but claiming Housing Benefit and those who cannot afford to buy at the lower quartile house prices.

The following table demonstrates the position of the intermediate housing market in Rochford which includes both intermediate housing products and the private rented sector.

Potential Scale of Intermediate Housing Market

	Unable to afford Social Rents	Narrow Intermediate Housing Market	Total Intermediate Housing Market
Rochford	6.5%	27.4%	42.8%
East of England	10.1%	27.6%	44.1%

Source: SHMA 2008

Older People

A higher proportion of the population in Rochford is made up of older people which is projected to grow over the coming years. From now until 2026 there will be a substantial increase in those over the age of 65.

The demand for housing from the District's ageing population will require a range of housing solutions. The Government's Strategy, Lifetime Homes, Neighbourhoods:

A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society (CLG 2008) emphasises the importance of older people having access to good quality housing which is vital to helping them maintain their independence and quality of life.

The decisions of older households will influence the supply of housing available for other groups and will impact upon the whole of the housing market. There are a number of housing options that could be considered such as bungalows which are accessible, specialist housing products from retirement homes to nursing homes, care homes, extra care housing and sheltered housing.

It is anticipated that there will be a sharp growth in demand for specialist housing from older people mainly from the 75+ and 85+ age groups. 'Homes for Older People: An Accommodation Strategy for Older People in Essex 2007-2009 (Essex County Council) says that the current housing provision in the County is inadequate in terms of people's aspirations and expectations and the type and location of existing accommodation.

The Government requires that all new public sector housing will be built to the 'Lifetime Homes Standards' by 2011. From 2013 all new homes are to be built to these standards. Through the LDF process it is proposed that all new homes from 2010 will comply with the Lifetime Homes Standards which will help support the changing needs of the ageing population of the District throughout their lifetime.

In the District there are a variety of sheltered housing schemes for older people which are managed by a number of Registered Social Landlords including Rochford Housing Association, Springboard Housing Association, Hanover Housing Association, Shaftesbury Housing Association and Sancturary Housing Association. There are two Extracare schemes, one in Rayleigh provided by Swan Housing Association and one in Rochford provided by Springboard Housing Association. A number of sheltered schemes are also provided by private organisations including McCarthy and Stone and Peverel Management Services.

Rochford Housing Association is undertaking a review of some of its schemes for older people. A programme of remodelling a number of these is due to commence in January 2009.

BME Households

As previously discussed the BME population in the District is very small. There is anecdotal evidence that BME households are moving from London into the TGSE sub region and an increase in people from EU Accession countries in Eastern Europe. We will work with our sub regional local authority partners to identify housing and support needs for BME households.

How Demand will be Met

Choice Based Lettings

The Council manages its own Housing Register and that of Rochford Housing Association (RHA) and makes nominations to RHA and other housing associations. The Council is working towards the introduction of a Choice Based Lettings scheme which is intended to offer those in need of housing a greater role in deciding where they wish to live.

With our sub regional partners we are exploring options for a sub regional Choice Based Lettings scheme with a view to widening choice and facilitating cross boundary lettings.

New Homes

The East of England Plan has set a target for 4,600 new homes to be built in Rochford over the period from 2001 to 2021. Housing provision figures are determined by the Secretary of State as minimum targets. Rochford must increase its provision of housing over the rest of the plan period to reach its minimum housing provision targets.

Minimum dwelling provision 2001-2021

Area	Minimum dwelling provision 2001-2021 (net increase with annual average rates in brackets)		
	Total to build 2001-2021	Of which already built 2001-2006	Minimum still to build 2006-2021
Rochford	4,600	810 (160)	3,790 (250)
Basildon	10,700	1,200 (240)	9,480 (630)
Castle Point	4,000	1,101 (200)	2,990 (200)
Southend	6,500	1,900 (380)	4,600 (310)
Thurrock	18,500	4,380 (880)	14,120 (940)

Since 2001 and up to 31st March 2007, a net total of 1,260 dwellings were completed in the Rochford District.

Breakdown of completions

Total completions	Market housing	Affordable housing
1260	1148	112

The building programme in the District is an ongoing process with housing completions and new sites constantly coming forward for development. PPS3 recommends the need for Local Authorities to have regard to the changing composition of households and the housing needs of the area. The chart below gives an indication of the number of dwellings by bed size completed in the District in 2006-2007.

Dwelling size

	Dwelling Size (no. of bedrooms)			
	1	2	3	4
Percentage of units completed (gross) 06-07	32.5	37.4	13.4	16.7

As in recent years, one and two bedroom properties have constituted the majority of completions. These went some way to address the shortage of this size of property that was identified in the Housing Needs Survey of 2004.

A housing trajectory has been prepared to estimate the number of completions that will take place up to 2012. Based on known sites in the District the following table shows the estimated net completions from 2007 to 2012.

Projected net completions

Type of estimated gain	Year					TOTAL
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	
Units under construction	177	29	7	24	0	237
Units with planning permission	4	67	73	0	0	144
From sites currently with outline permission	3	8	26	0	0	37
From sites currently subject of S106 negotiations	0	0	0	0	0	0
From sites where application is currently under construction/where pre-application discussions have taken place/otherwise identified sites	0	10	0	67	244	321
From other land allocated for residential purposes	0	0	0	0	36	36
TOTAL	184	114	106	91	280	775

*Rochford District Council Monitoring Report

The table above shows that a net total of 775 dwellings are expected to be provided in the District between 2007 and 2012. In total 2035 dwellings are projected to be completed in the District between 2001 and 2012. Annualising the District's housing requirement between 2007 and 2021 an average of 250 dwellings will need to be developed each year. It is clear from the current five year housing supply and housing trajectory figures that there is not an adequate provision of land for residential development in order to meet the East of England Plan requirement of 4,600 new homes.

The potential for developing new housing on 'brownfield' sites within Rochford is increasingly becoming harder to meet. As almost all developed land is in current use creative responses will have to be adopted to meet Rochford's future housing need.

Affordable Homes

Affordable housing (as set out in the Government's Planning Policy Statement 3 – Housing PPS3) includes social rented and intermediate housing provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. Affordable housing should:

- Meet the needs of eligible households including availability at low enough costs for them to afford determined with regard to local incomes and house prices
- Include provision for the home to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or if a home ceases to be affordable any subsidy should generally be recycled for additional housing provision

Levels of affordable and social housing in the District have historically been low. Over the last few years, the growing differential between house prices and earnings has made access to the housing market sector increasingly difficult. This has been reflected in the increase in the level of 'need' identified.

The table above shows the number and type of affordable dwellings completed in the District since 2006.

Affordable Housing Completions and Acquisitions 2006/2008

	2006/2007	NO and type of dwelling	Size of dwellings
Total completions of which:	28		
Funded through RSL	4	4 Shared Ownership	2 bed flats
Funded through developer contribution		20 Market sale (80%)	1 & 2 bed flats
Total acquisitions with LA support	4	4 Social rented	2 x 2 bed flats 2 x 1 bed flats
	2007/2008	NO and type of dwelling	Size of dwellings
Total completions of which:	70		
Funded through RSL		2 Shared Ownership 4 Social rented 30 Social rented 10 Social rented 2 Social rented	2 bed flats 4 x 2 bed flats 24 x 2 bed flats 6 x 1 bed flats 2 x 2 bed flats 6 x 1 bed flats 2 x 2 bed wheelchair adapted bungalows 2 x 1 bed wheelchair adapted bungalows
Funded through developer contribution		22 Market sale (80%)	1 & 2 bed flats
Total acquisitions	Nil		

Please note: These figures will vary from those given in planning related documents due to the way in which completions are recorded.

In terms of future housing need the SHMA estimates a net annual affordable housing need of 131 homes. This housing analysis has demonstrated that 'need' for affordable housing is greater than the 'supply' of affordable housing on an annual basis.

Partnership working with Rochford Housing Association and other RSLs

Contained in the transfer offer submitted by RHA the Housing Association aims to deliver at least 50 additional affordable homes annually. The Council is working closely with RHA to identify potential development sites and to ensure any new homes meet the District's identified need.

We have worked with our RSL partners in developing a small number of low cost home ownership schemes including shared ownership and discount market housing for key workers. On a number of schemes we have a partnering nominations agreement with the developing RSL which entitles the Council to 100% of initial nominations and 75% nominations thereafter. We are able to nominate local people to these schemes providing they fulfil the Council's eligibility criteria.

A new HomeBuy scheme is being developed in partnership with Circle Anglia which is due for completion in January 2009. There are 23 homes comprising 19 two bedroom flats and 4 three bedroom houses. This scheme will make a substantial contribution to the provision of affordable homes for local people.

We will continue to work with our RSL partners to maximise opportunities for developing new affordable housing in the District. In order to meet a wide range of housing needs we will look to provide a variety of tenure options and property sizes to ensure that we offer choice for local people.

We are setting up regular liaison meetings with our RSL partners so that any new development opportunities can be identified early. These meetings will also provide an opportunity to review nomination issues and to discuss any management problems that may arise.

HomeBuy

The Council works with Moat Housing, who is the Government's appointed HomeBuy Agent for the whole of the Essex area. All HomeBuy products are marketed through them. We will continue to work with Moat to promote HomeBuy products and any other new affordable housing initiatives.

Section 106 Agreements

Some new affordable housing will be provided via the planning system with private housing through Section 106 agreements. The current Rochford District Council Replacement Local Plan (2006) requires 15% of dwellings on new housing developments of 25 dwellings or more to be affordable. This threshold has been superseded by PPS3 which states that the minimum site size threshold is 15 dwellings. The Council is currently consulting on the draft LDF Core Strategy which

sets out the preferred option for Affordable Housing, which is at least 35% of dwellings on all developments of 15 or more units. This is in line with the East of England Plan which sets a regional target of 35%. It is anticipated that the Council will increase the percentage of affordable housing requirements to reflect this figure. However, each site will be evaluated separately taking into consideration the viability of the development and housing need required in that area.

Rural Exception to Policy Sites

The current adopted Local Plan has a criteria-based policy on rural exception sites. The Council has formed a partnership with a Housing Association which has considerable experience in developing homes in rural areas. This will contribute to the Council achieving more stable and balanced rural communities in the District.

Greener Homes

In 2006 the Government announced a 10 year timetable towards a target that all new homes from 2016 must be built to zero carbon standards to be achieved through a tightening of the Building Regulations. A Code for Sustainable Homes has been published which measures the sustainability of a new home, covering energy and other water use. By 2010 under Code Level 3 all new homes should achieve a reduction of 25% less carbon emissions, by 2013 under Code Level 4 a reduction of 44% should be achieved and by 2016 under Code level 6 all new homes to be carbon neutral.

Key Priorities

- Work with RHA to provide at least 50 new affordable homes per annum
- Maximise the delivery of new affordable homes through the planning system
- Develop and implement a Choice Based Lettings Scheme
- Maximise delivery of affordable housing
- Work with RSL partners to identify development opportunities
- Improve partnership working with RSLs
- All new homes to be built to excellent design standards and are sustainable
- Promote HomeBuy and other Government affordable housing initiatives
- Develop new HomeBuy scheme in partnership with Circle Anglia

6. Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Groups

Homelessness

Homelessness is recognised the most acute form of housing need. The Council ensures a proactive approach is taken to the prevention of homelessness whilst seeking to find solutions to its main causes.

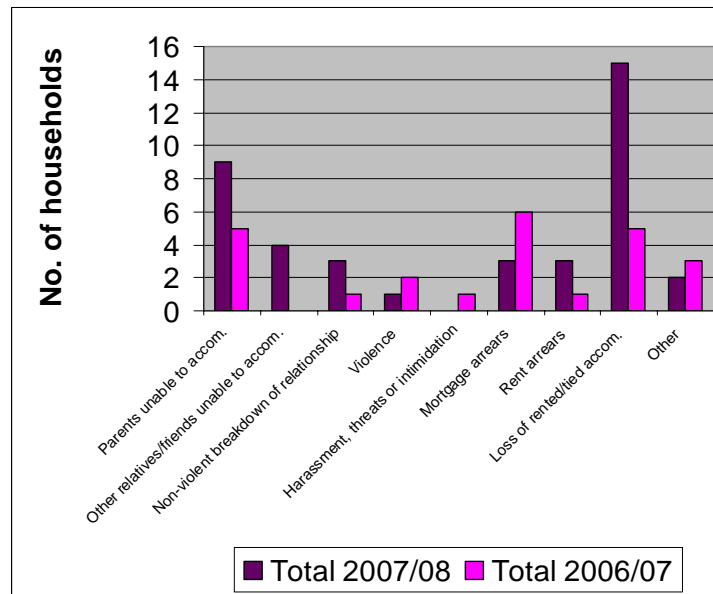
There are national targets relating to reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation and also increasing the number of affordable homes available. Local targets relate to reducing rough sleeping, preventing homelessness, reducing the time in bed and breakfast and hostel accommodation and making timely decisions on homelessness applications.

Under the provisions of the Homelessness Act 2002 the Council produced a five year Homelessness Strategy in 2003. The review of this strategy is due to be completed by the end of 2008. Since the strategy was developed there have been a number of improvements in the service provided including:

- Conversion of Hostel accommodation with shared facilities into self contained flats
- Improved interview facilities
- Revision of the Lettings Policy to afford greater priority to homeless applicants
- Reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation
- Increased resources for the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team
- Less time taken to decide cases
- Development of rent deposit/ rent in advance schemes
- Provision of a Floating Support service through Essex Supporting People

The new strategy will build on the successes and will aim to:

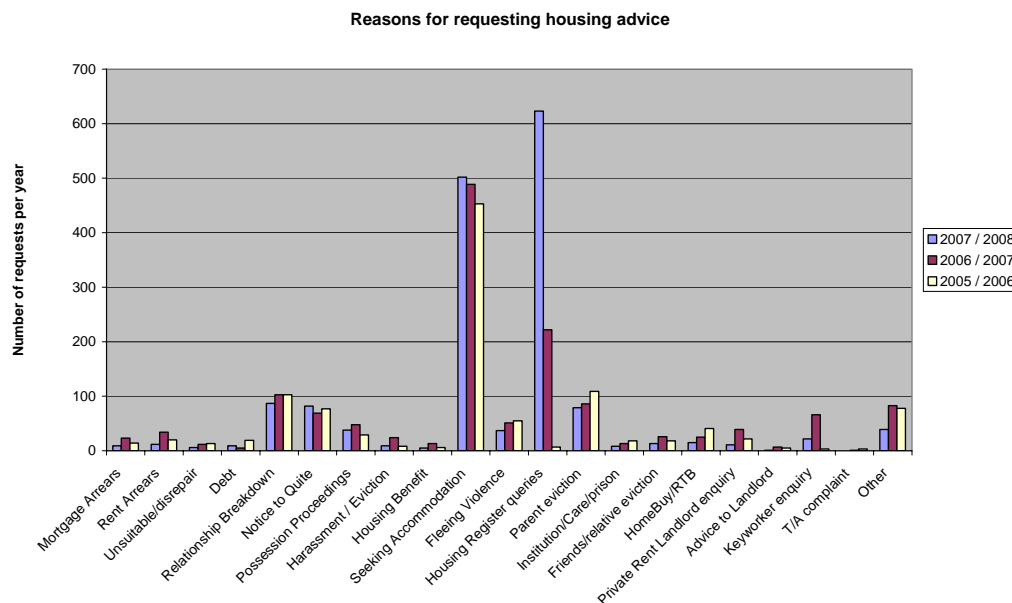
- Further reduce the numbers of applicants in temporary accommodation in order to meet the Governments target and the target in the LAA
- Develop a youth homelessness strategy
- Cease the use of bed and breakfast establishments
- Improve access to private rented property by continuing to develop relationships with landlords and by further developing rent deposit and other incentive schemes.
- Develop partnerships with RSLs, Social Care and other agencies



The table above shows that the most common grounds for homelessness in the District are:

- Parents no longer willing to accommodate children
- Loss of rented or tied accommodation due to termination of assured Shorthold tenancy

The figures below highlight the main reasons for people requesting housing advice in the District over the last 3 years.



Supporting People (SP)

Supporting People is a central government programme which funds and determines strategic priorities for housing related support for vulnerable people.

The Supporting People East Region Group published its Supporting People East of England Regional Strategy 2008-11. This provides an outline of the direction of travel and the strategic priorities to meet the housing related support needs of vulnerable people in the East Region. It provides a link between local and national policy enabling SP to work at regional level.

The Supporting People Programme in Rochford is operated by Essex County Council. The Essex Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010, currently being reviewed, sets out the priorities for the area with the aim of helping vulnerable people to become more independent. Funding is provided centrally. However, from April 2009 it is the government's intention that all Supporting People funding will be routed through the LAA as part of the LAA grant. Essex Supporting People is a pathfinder authority and the results of this pilot will inform CLG on how funding for SP will be distributed in the future.

The Council in partnership with other Essex Councils is supporting a PFI bid by Essex County Council to CLG with the aim of enabling vulnerable adults to access affordable housing. It is proposing to provide new build Extracare housing for older people and accommodation for vulnerable people with learning disabilities, mental health problems, people with drug or alcohol problems, people with a sensory or physical disability, women and children in need of refuge and children moving on from care.

We will continue to work with Essex Supporting People and partners in looking at ways of meeting the housing and support needs of vulnerable people and how we can improve their lives.

Handyperson Scheme and Gardening Service

A Handyperson Scheme and Gardening Service operated by Springboard Home Improvement Agency were introduced in 2003. These aim to provide a low cost service to those who are over the age of 60 and/or disabled, who are in receipt of an income related benefit or are on a low income. The Council is the main funder of the schemes although contributions are made by Essex County Council and the Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

The Handyperson Scheme provides eligible residents with a minor repairs service to their homes and help for disabled people with adaptations such as hand and grab rails. In addition home security and safety checks are carried out.

The Gardening Service clears overgrown gardens, repairs to fencing and takes away garden waste that is not suitable for composting.

Both schemes have grown rapidly since their introduction and the demand remains high. In 2003/4 47 people were assisted under the Handyperson Scheme with this rising to 397 in 2007/8. Similarly in 2003/4 47 gardening jobs were completed in comparison with 2007/8 where this had risen to 603.

Domestic Violence

The Council takes Domestic Violence very seriously and has a dedicated Domestic Violence Officer who provides advice and assistance to victims. It places a strong emphasis on tackling this issue and works hard to support its victims (Men, Women and children). The reported numbers of domestic violence cases have unfortunately increased over the last few years as the table below demonstrates.

Year	Reported Cases
2004/2005	23
2005/2006	45
2006/2007	56
2007/2008	68

The Council works proactively to engage with victims of domestic violence by:

- i. Holding a monthly Domestic Violence Panel with Castle Point Borough Council which engages in developing and supporting initiatives for victims
- ii. Promoting support services for victims
- iii. Holding a Domestic Awareness Week in partnership with Castle Point Borough Council.

The Council works with Basildon's Women's Aid Group in operating a resource centre called 'Parklands Women's Centre' for women and children who have suffered from domestic violence. The Centre provides trained volunteers who can offer support and advice on domestic violence issues.

The Council operates a Sanctuary Scheme for victims of domestic violence which is funded by the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership. The scheme provides a number of options to victims which will enable them to stay in their own home including the installation of a 'safe room'. Since the Scheme commenced in July 2005 15 victims have been assisted.

Funding is provided by the Council to Basildon Women's Aid for the provision of an outreach service in Rochford.

A second stage refuge has been developed in the District in partnership with Swan Housing Association for those escaping domestic violence. This is used for those who have moved out of emergency accommodation and are awaiting an offer for permanent rehousing.

Physically and Sensory Disabled

The Council provides grants for disabled people who require adaptations to their homes. The Handyperson Scheme is also available to help disabled people with minor repairs and adaptations.

RHA has an annual programme for aids and adaptations and has committed more than £100,000 per year for these. It is drawing up a Service Level Agreement with Occupational Therapy so that this work can be targeted to those most in need.

Learning Disabilities

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Essex 2008 (JSNA) estimates that in 2007 there were 123 people over the age of 18 with a learning disability in Rochford. The Council works closely with Essex County Council and other agencies in identifying and meeting the housing need for people with learning disabilities. The County Council has recently published its' draft Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities which looks at the supply and demand for housing for this group and makes a number of recommendations to increase housing choices.

Within the District a new scheme for people with learning disabilities is being developed in partnership with Springboard Housing Association. The scheme comprising of 14 self contained flats will enable people to move from residential care to more independent living.

Mental Health

It is estimated that almost 150,000 people across Essex are experiencing mental health problems (JSNA 2008). Six Essex County areas have higher than average working age people who are claiming benefit/allowance for a mental or behavioural disorder. Rochford has one of the lowest rates within the County. In the past, it has been difficult to establish the housing need of this group. However, following the conclusions of the JSNA, by working more closely with Essex County Council and our other local authority partners this will help us to identify any potential housing needs of people with mental health problems.

Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (BME)

The District has a small, percentage of BME residents. The TGSE Sub Regional Housing Strategy identifies a need for local stakeholders to engage with BME communities to identify housing and support needs of those communities. We will work with our sub regional partners to improve information about BME communities' needs and monitor the impact of migration flows.

Gypsies and Travellers

Local authorities are required to make provision for sites/pitches to meet identified needs of Gypsies and Traveller communities. The East of England Plan identifies an urgent need to address a shortfall of sites for Gypsies and Travellers. Within the Plan Rochford has been allocated 15 pitches to be provided in the District by 2011 with an additional 3% per annum of the total planned provision from 2011 onwards. At present there are only 3 authorised pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in the

District. The Council has accepted this figure of 15 additional pitches and will show how these are to be delivered through the Local Development Framework. Once the extra number of pitches are delivered the number will be increased to 18 providing space for 36 caravans. However, there is still some concern that the figures proposed may not provide an accurate assessment of the needs of Gypsy and Travellers particularly post 2011. A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment is being prepared by local authorities within the County with a view of providing a more accurate figure.

Key Priorities

- Review and update Homeless Strategy
- Reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation
- Increase the number of housing options for older people and vulnerable groups
- Provide additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches
- Complete a scheme for people with Learning Disabilities in partnership with Springboard Housing Association
- Provide a Gardening Service

7. Investing in the Housing Stock

Decent Homes

Meeting the Decent Homes Standard has been an objective of the Government over recent years and relates to homes across all housing sectors.

All social landlords are expected to ensure that all their homes meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010. A decent home is defined by the Government as being one that:

- meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing – no Category 1 Hazards
- is in a reasonable state of repair
- has reasonably modern facilities and services
- provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

Up until the Comprehensive Spending review (2007) the Government had the following target for homes in the private sector:

- a minimum 70% of vulnerable households would be living in 'Decent Homes' by April 2010
- a minimum 75% of vulnerable households would be living in 'Decent Homes' by 2015

Vulnerable households have been defined for the purpose of the Decent Homes Standard as those in receipt of at least one of the principal means tested or disability related benefits.

The above target for homes in the private sector was outlined in Public Service Agreement (PSA) 7 although it was not included in the new set of national performance indicators which came into force in April 2008. However, Regional Assemblies are continuing to make funding available to Local Authorities for decent homes work until 2011, so, for the time being, the decent homes standard still underpins private sector renewal strategy.

Homes in the Private Sector

There are 31,235 private sector dwellings in the District equating to 91% of the total housing stock.

Information from the House Condition and Energy Efficiency Report 2007 shows that 83.6% of vulnerable households in the District are living in a decent home. This figure is 13.6% above the government target of 70% which is to be achieved by 2010. However, as the private housing stock ages its condition has the potential to become non-decent. The number of vulnerable households in the District is likely to increase as the population ages and if the current economic down-turn continues. Consequently, the overall number of vulnerable households living in a decent home could decrease as time goes on.

The Council is committed to reducing the number of non-decent homes in the District by means of providing grant aid to vulnerable households and working with landlords in the private rented sector to ensure that they maintain their properties in a safe and habitable condition. These priorities will be reflected in our new Private Sector Housing Strategy due to be published in 2009.

Under the Private Sector Renewal Grant system the Council aims to reduce the number of non-decent homes in the District by 50 properties per annum. Together with our TGSE partners, a bid was submitted in September 2008 for funding to tackle non-decency. Through the successful bid, which is awaiting approval by the Secretary of State, a sum of £4.3 million has been allocated to the sub region. It is anticipated that the number of non-decent homes can be reduced by substantially more than 50 per annum once bid funding has been allocated.

Homes in the Social Sector

RSLs are required to bring all their housing stock up to the Decent Homes Standard. The Housing Corporation monitors their progress which is reported through their Regulatory and Statistical Returns.

Rochford Housing Association will spend £40 million on major repairs and improvements over the next 10 years to its stock which was transferred from the Council. £27 million is earmarked for the first 5 years so that the homes can be brought up to meet the Rochford Standard which incorporates works/improvements above the Government's Decent Homes Standard. This includes:

- new modern kitchens
- installation of central heating
- updating of security in homes
- improved estate security
- providing good thermal insulation

The Council will regularly monitor Rochford Housing Association and its progress towards meeting the Decent Homes Standard for the transferred stock.

Caravan Sites

In the District there are almost 700 households occupying mobile homes situated on 6 local sites licensed by the Council for permanent residential use. Regular inspections are carried out to ensure compliance with the site licence conditions, which are aimed at safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of the occupants. There is no decency standard for caravans however, the Council's Home Maintenance and Adaptation Grant is available to help vulnerable residents keep their mobile homes in a satisfactory condition.

Private Rented Sector

There are over 1350 privately rented dwellings equating to nearly 4% of the District's total housing stock. The 2007 House Condition and Energy Efficiency Report estimated that 160 of these dwellings were affected by Category 1 hazards and 374 by Category 2 Hazards. Category 1 Hazards are items of disrepair that represent a high risk to the health and safety of the occupants. Less serious risks are classified Category 2 Hazards.

The Private Sector Housing Team works to maintain and improve standards of repair and management in privately owned and rented homes. Complaints from tenants about disrepair, dampness and otherwise unsatisfactory housing conditions are investigated and enforcement action taken where necessary.

The team also deals with complaints about overcrowding, harassment and illegal eviction. Advice is provided on a wide range of housing issues.

There are currently 11 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the District and a programme of inspection commenced in order to ensure they meet the relevant safety and welfare standards.

The Council has an established Landlord's Forum which meets twice a year. The Forum is an opportunity to inform landlords of current issues and developments that affect the private rented sector.

Energy Efficiency

The average SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) rating for dwellings in the Rochford District is 56 which is slightly below average in terms of overall efficiency but higher than the national average of 52.5. The main issue is the relationship between energy efficiency and fuel poverty.

Fuel poverty occurs when 10% or more of a household's income is spent on fuel for the home. Since 2004 energy prices for both gas and electricity have risen rapidly. The Government has released data which supports fears that consistently high energy prices will result in more and more households falling into fuel poverty in the future. The Government estimated that there are at least 2.5 million households in fuel poverty which could rise if fuel prices continue to increase.

Improving energy efficiency in homes will go some way to alleviating fuel poverty and at the same time reduce domestic carbon dioxide emissions. The Government is committed to reducing per capita CO2 emissions; National Indicator 186 requires local authorities to report an annual percentage reduction in such emissions.

The Council has entered into a partnership with British Gas to enable home owners to obtain discounted loft and cavity wall insulation together with a reduction in their Council Tax. A discount is also available if home owners purchase a solar hot water system. In addition, the Government has made funding available to enable all those over 70 years of age regardless of vulnerability to benefit from free loft and cavity wall insulation. We will promote any other schemes that become available.

The Council promotes energy efficiency through roadshows, the Council Newspaper (Rochford District Matters) and a leaflet will be delivered to all residents in the District in early 2009. The Government's 'Warmfront' scheme is actively promoted by the Council. Through this scheme energy efficiency grants are available to vulnerable households. The Council also provides vulnerable households with 'top-up' grants where the cost of energy efficiency improvements exceeds the maximum 'Warmfront' grant. The following table shows the number of households who received a grant and the type of works completed.

Warmfront grants

Works Category	Households			Percentage of Households		
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Boiler Replacement Gas	28	72	94	13.59%	17.14%	29.38%
Boiler Replacement LPG		2	7		0.48%	2.19%
Boiler Replacement Oil		1			0.24%	
Cavity Wall Insulation	58	105	57	28.16%	25.00%	17.81%
CFL (light bulbs)	206	420	320	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Draughtproofing	65	63	41	31.55%	15.00%	12.81%
Electric Storage Heating	1	4	4	0.49%	0.95%	1.25%
Gas Central Heating	10	20	5	4.85%	4.75%	1.56%
Loft Insulation	123	171	107	59.71%	40.71%	33.44%
Material Supply	36	103	122	17.48%	24.52%	38.13%
Tank Jackets	19	31	25	9.22%	7.38%	7.81%
Total Households	206	420	320			

- Please note that the increase in number of households receiving a grant in 2006/07 was due, in part, to a mail shot sent out to those households in receipt of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1996 set a target of improving energy efficiency by 30% by 2011. In the District the overall improvement in energy efficiency in all domestic properties from 1st April 1996 to 31st March 2007 was 17.83%.

Disabled Facilities Grant

The Council provides Disabled Facilities Grants which are mandatory for those people with disabilities who require adaptations to their homes. Since 2004 the demand for adaptations in the District has steadily risen and this trend is likely to continue as the number of elderly residents in the District increases. The table below shows the number of grants made in 2006-2008 and the total amount spent.

Disabled Facilities Grant

Year	Number of Grants	Total Value
2006-2007	34	£199,000
2007-2008	19	£123,000

Home Repairs

Through the Rochford Home Maintenance and Adaptations Grant Scheme the Council provides financial assistance to enable vulnerable householders to carry out repairs to their homes. In many cases the grant aid supports measures to improve the thermal efficiency and safety of a dwelling and may make a difference between someone being able to stay in their home or having to move into for example sheltered accommodation. Improvements may include replacement windows, doors, roof repairs and electrical re-wiring. The table below shows the number of grants made in 2006-2008 and the total amount spent.

Rochford Home Maintenance and Adaptations Grant

Year	Number of Grants	Total Value
2006-2007	48	£103,000
2007-2008	36	£73,000

The Council works in partnership with its Home Improvement Agency, Springboard Housing Association, to deliver both types of grant.

The Council also provides a Handyperson Service which provides eligible residents with a minor repairs service to their homes and help for disabled people with adaptations.

Empty Homes

There are 417 homes within the District that have been empty for 6 months or more (long term empty).

We are aware that our action in addressing the issue of empty homes has been limited. We have traditionally relied upon enforcement action rather than any financial incentives to bring empty homes back into use. However, in addressing this we are producing an Empty Homes Strategy. This Strategy will outline a variety of measures that are available to us so that we can bring some of these homes back into use, therefore, providing the Council with a potential additional source of housing.

A recently successful bid by the TGSE sub region, has received an allocation of £1.5 million to help the sub region tackle the problem of empty homes. Although the Council does not know at this stage how much it will be allocated it is envisaged that any financial contribution will assist the Council in providing grant aid to owners of empty dwellings in the future. By bringing empty homes back into use it is intended to increase the supply of affordable housing using Voluntary Dwelling Management

Agreements as an alternative to statutory enforcement. In agreement with the owner, homes will be let for an agreed period of time at an affordable rent. It is anticipated that these homes will be used for homeless families with nominations coming from TGSE local authority partners.

Key Priorities

- Produce a Private Sector Housing Strategy
- Reduce the number of non-decent dwellings occupied by vulnerable people
- Reduce the number of empty homes
- Improve energy efficiency in homes and reduce fuel poverty
- Work with private sector landlords
- Promote independent living

8. Delivering the Strategy

In preparing this strategy we have made reference to a number of key documents which have shaped our view on what we are able to deliver. Our priorities support the local Sustainable Community Strategy and are closely aligned with Council policies.

We will monitor this strategy through the following Action Plan which is divided into our Priority Areas. The Action Plan contains a number of performance targets some of which relate to the National Indicators as set out in the Essex LAA. Our progress will be measured through these targets every six months which will enable us to identify and resolve any problem areas. A yearly review of the strategy will take place which will enable us to adapt to any changing circumstances or policy requirements.

Action Plan

Managing Future Growth					
Priority Area	Action	Target	Lead Team	Timetable	Outcomes
How Demand will be met					
Maximise the delivery of affordable housing through partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to identify and agree suitable sites for development with RHA under terms of LSVT to identify and agree suitable sites for development with other RSLs develop housing schemes with LAA partners to support bids to the Housing Corporation 	At least 70 new homes per annum	Housing Strategy	Yearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 210 “affordable units” delivered over the duration of the Strategy.
To maximise the delivery of new affordable homes through the planning system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to work closely with the Planning Department to secure affordable housing through s106 agreements to work with the Council's Planning Policy Team to ensure planning policies are adopted which enable the delivery of appropriate levels of affordable housing 	As set out in the LDF	Housing Strategy/Planning Housing Strategy/Planning	Ongoing Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aim to secure 35% affordable provision on site above.
Develop and implement a Choice Based Lettings Scheme by 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reach agreement of a suitable scheme consultation of proposed scheme implement CBL scheme 	1 April 2010	Housing Strategy	June 2009 September 2009 1 April 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choice Based Lettings scheme fully operational by April 2010

Improve partnership working with RSLs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up a RSL liaison group • review nomination agreements • improve monitoring arrangements with RSLs 	March 2009 June 2009 June 2009	Housing Strategy	To meet quarterly Ongoing Quarterly monitoring forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSL Liaison group set up by March 2009. • Nomination agreements reviewed with RSLs by June 2009. • Monitoring arrangements by June 2009.
All new homes to be built to excellent design standards and are sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new homes to be built to Lifetime Homes Standards • work with RSLs to improve the energy efficiency of new homes 	100% by 2010 as set out in the LDF 25% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2010	Housing Strategy/Planning Housing Strategy	Ongoing Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All new homes to be built to Lifetime Homes Standard by 2010. • Reduce CO2 emissions by 2010.
Promote HomeBuy and other Government initiatives to help first-time buyers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advertise on the Council's web site, in the local area and the local press 	5 completions per annum	Housing Strategy	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve 5 HomeBuy completions annually.
Develop new HomeBuy scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work in partnership with Circle Anglia to deliver and promote scheme • agree nomination rights 	23 units by January 2009	Housing Strategy	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New HomeBuy scheme of 23 units developed by June 2009.
Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Groups					
Priority Area	Action	Target	Lead Team	Timetable	Outcomes
Review and update Homelessness Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produce strategy and sign off by Members 	December 2008	Housing Strategy/Homeless	On target for completion by December 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless Strategy completed and signed off by Members by December 2008.
Reduce the number of people living in temporary accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase homelessness prevention • develop alternatives to temporary accommodation • work with LA partners to meet LAA target • work with RSLs and other agencies to provide suitable 	Maximum 30 households in temporary accommodation by 2010 Maximum 20 households in temporary	Homeless and Housing Advice Housing Strategy/ Homeless and Housing Advice Housing Strategy/Homeless	Yearly Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation up to a maximum of 30 in 2010. • Reduce the number of homeless households in temporary

	move-on accommodation	accommodation by 2011	ss and Housing Advice Housing Strategy/Homeless And Housing Advice		accommodation up to a maximum of 20 by 2011.
Increase the number of housing opportunities for older people and vulnerable groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work with Essex CC and other agencies to identify need support the PFI bid by Essex County Council identify and agree suitable sites for development support bids to the Housing Corporation 	<p>As per identified need</p> <p>August 2010</p>	Housing Strategy/Homeless And Housing Advice	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop new housing opportunities for older people and vulnerable groups in line with identified need.
Provide additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify suitable sites 	15 pitches subject to the outcome of the Essex GTAA	Housing Strategy/Planning	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreed number of pitches provided.
Provide a scheme for people with learning disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work in partnership with Springboard Housing Association to deliver scheme agree nomination rights 	14 units by December 2009	Housing Strategy	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New scheme of 14 units for people with learning disabilities developed by December 2009.
Provide a Gardening Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> support provision of a Gardening Service through Springboard Home Improvement Agency 	720 jobs in 2008/09	Private Sector Housing	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 720 jobs completed in 2008/09.
Investing in the Housing Stock					
Priority Area	Action	Target	Lead Team	Timetable	Outcomes
Produce Private Sector Housing Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> complete strategy and sign off by Members 	Jan 2009	Private Sector Housing	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Sector Housing Strategy completed and signed off by Members by

					January 2009.
Reduce the number of non-decent dwellings occupied by vulnerable people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide Home Maintenance and Adaptations Grants 	50 per annum	Private Sector Housing	Yearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50 grants completed per annum.
Reduce the number of empty properties in the District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> produce an empty homes strategy support TGSE bid for empty homes funding 	A minimum of 5 empty homes brought back into use	Private Sector Housing	Yearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum of 5 empty homes brought back into use per annum.
Improve energy efficiency in homes and reduce fuel poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> promote energy efficiency schemes provide Warm Front top up grants 	A minimum of 350 homes provided with measures to improve energy efficiency	Private Sector Housing	Yearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum of 350 homes provided with measure to improve energy efficiency per annum.
Work with private sector landlords to ensure they maintain their properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participate in the Council's Landlord Forum 	2 times per year	Private Sector Housing	Yearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in the Council's Landlords Forum twice per annum.
Promote independent living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> support provision of Handyperson Scheme through Springboard Home Improvement Agency provide Disabled Facilities Grants 	390 people assisted in 2008/09 30 per annum subject to demand	Private Sector Housing	Yearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 390 people assisted under the Handyperson Scheme in 2008/9. Provide 30 Disabled Facility Grants per annum, subject to demand.