

CONTENTS

	<i>Page Number</i>
1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. BEST VALUE	5
3. ASSESSING HOUSING NEEDS	7
3.1 Homelessness	8
3.2 Homeless and Housing Advice Service	9
3.3 Temporary Accommodation	10
3.4 Domestic Violence	11
3.5 Waiting Lists and Allocation Policies	11
4. SPECIAL HOUSING NEEDS	13
4.1 Supporting People	13
4.2 Mental Health	14
4.3 Learning Difficulties	14
4.4 Physical and Sensory Disability	14
4.5 Frail Elderly	15
4.6 Asylum Seekers	15
4.7 Young People	15
4.8 Black and Minority Ethnic Groups	16
4.9 Other Special Needs	16
5. STOCK CONDITION AND PRIVATE SECTOR POLICY	17
5.1 Stock Condition	17
5.2 Grants	17
5.3 Private Rented sector	17
5.4 Home Energy Conservation Act	18
6. RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS	19
6.1 Local Authority Social Housing Grant Programme	19
6.2 Land Availability, Planning Policies and Objectives	20
6.3 Under Occupation	21
6.4 Low Cost Home Ownership	21
6.5 Employment	22
6.6 Key Workers	22
6.7 Community Safety	23
7. CONSULTATION	25
8. APPENDICES	27





1. INTRODUCTION

In our Housing Strategy, which was published in 2000, we outlined how we would seek to address the current and likely future need for affordable housing in Hertsmere over the next three years, in order to benefit all who work, live in, and have connections with the Borough. Since then, we have been working with our partners, stakeholders and with the general public towards achieving the objectives outlined in our Housing Strategy.

We undertook to review the strategy every year, in line with government guidance. This is the second review of our strategy and should be read in conjunction with the original document.

Hertsmere Borough Council aims to deliver good quality, efficient and effective housing services. Our commitment to this has been demonstrated by our decision to undertake an early Best Value Review of our housing services. The results of the review and our priorities for the next year are set out in Section 2 of this document.

In addition we recognise national issues which are of relevance to our local communities and have outlined these in our corporate plan:

-  Reducing social exclusion;
-  Meeting the challenge of providing sufficient affordable housing in an area of high demand and very high house prices;
-  Addressing the housing needs of key workers;
-  Introducing choice into social housing allocations.

We recognise that in order to address these issues we require detailed information of our local housing market and we aim to build on our knowledge in this area. We have also seen the introduction of new legislation, most notably the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Regulatory Reform Order 2002, which will inform our strategy and practice in the forthcoming year.







Cllr Neil Payne
Leader of the Council and Housing Portfolio Holder



2. BEST VALUE





Best Value is the single most important priority for the Council, as outlined in our Corporate Plan. In our Housing Strategy, we said we would complete a Best Value Review of our housing service, devise an Action Plan to improve services and respond to any recommendations arising from the Best Value inspection.

The review report, and action plan arising out of it, was initially approved by the Council in January 2001. The four key objectives of the review were:

-  To establish the optimum service delivery option for the homeless, housing register and housing advice service;
-  To maximise the efficiency of the homeless service;
-  To determine the effectiveness of a common allocation policy and / or a common housing register in the allocation of social housing;
-  To determine the most effective social housing grant delivery programme.

The Audit Commission inspected our Best Value Review in September 2001 and the Inspectors' report was published in January 2002. The Commission identified our housing service as poor, and unlikely to improve¹. We reviewed our Action Plan as a result of the Inspectors' comments, and the revised plan, adopted in January 2002, is attached at Appendix 1.




Our priorities for the next year are:

-  To establish an improved and integrated homeless, housing advice and housing register service (see section 3.2 below);
-  To review and reduce our approved development panel of housing associations (see section 6.1 below);
-  To make further progress towards establishing a common housing register for housing in Hertsmere (see section 3.5 below);
-  Further integration of the private sector housing strategy to support the key objectives of the service (see section 5 below).

¹ A full copy of the report can be obtained from the Commission's web site - www.bestvalueinspections.gov.uk

3. ASSESSING HOUSING NEEDS



Our strategy detailed the results of our housing needs survey, which established estimates of the true hidden housing needs in Hertsmere. Our housing needs survey has had a considerable impact in the development of policies and research, including:

-  Informing new Supplementary Planning Guidance on affordable housing, which was adopted in April 2002 (see section 6.2 below);
-  Informing negotiations with developers on provision of affordable housing under Policies H18 and H19 of the Local Plan;
-  Providing support to Ridgehill Housing Association's study into the issues of affordability within the borough (see section 6.4 below).

Over the first two years of our strategy, notwithstanding the 134 additional affordable homes delivered through our Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) programme during the first two years of our strategy (Appendix 6.2 refers), the trend of applicants awaiting housing on our register demonstrates a increasing overall unmet need (Appendix 2.1 refers), which appears to be increasing most sharply for three bedroom accommodation (Appendix 2.2 refers), and in the Bushey / Radlett / Elstree area of the borough (Appendix 2.3 refers).

In our strategy document, we said we would review our assessment of housing needs in the light of then anticipated government guidance.

This guidance has now been published, and we have reviewed our strategy as a result. We are encouraged that in general we appear to be following good practice guidance in respect of housing needs assessments. Two areas that we have noted in government guidance are:



-  Adequate in-house resources should be allowed for the commissioning and interpretation of externally commissioned studies, for ongoing monitoring and for the improvement of internal data systems. In particular, we will continue to make ongoing financial provision for updating our housing needs survey, provisionally in 2004.
-  Assessments provide an opportunity to build partnerships with a wider range of local and regional agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors, including with neighbouring authorities. In partnership with other Hertfordshire housing authorities, we have commissioned a County- wide assessment of needs as part of the process of updating our needs survey information. We have also been involved in the preparation of the Regional Housing Statement which will outline housing needs in the region and identify priorities for action.

We also said that we would conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the results of our housing needs survey in order to establish what solutions may help to meet the housing needs identified more effectively (particularly those in the owner-occupied sector). The first draft of this solutions analysis has been completed, and we will publish the final document by March 2003, and revise our strategy accordingly.

We consider that the wide-ranging consultation on our housing strategy, our joint working that we are engaging in to develop a community strategy for Hertsmere, and our joint working in preparation for *Supporting People* will enable us to develop an even more integrated picture of housing needs in the borough.

3.1 HOMELESSNESS



We said we would:

-  Continue to explore various options in order to progress the accommodation project in Borehamwood town centre in conjunction with a housing association and the Hertsmere Homeless Project;
-  Continue to work with our partners to consider whether a count of rough sleepers should be conducted.

We have continued to work closely with the Hertsmere Homeless Project. However, the Project has faced severe funding difficulties throughout the period of our strategy, which has limited our ability to fully progress joint working initiatives. We have attempted to give the Project as much support as our resources will allow to assist it in continuing its valuable work in the Borough.

When the Project's more immediate short-term difficulties are resolved; we will progress with them our previous stated objectives concerning the accommodation project and a count of rough sleepers.



We also said we would:

-  Continue to explore a rent guarantee scheme for single homeless people in conjunction with the Project. We will include this in our wider consideration of the option for a Rent Deposit scheme together with its resource implications which forms part of our Best Value Action Plan (see section 5.3 below);
-  Investigate more use of mortgage rescue as a solution to owner-occupiers facing homelessness through mortgage arrears. We have begun discussions with Ridgehill Housing Association regarding this, and we will aim to conclude this as part of the review of our housing advice services by March 2003, though we have noted that mortgage arrears do not form a significant element of homeless approaches at the moment.




3.2 HOMELESS AND HOUSING ADVICE SERVICE

Since the publication of our strategy, we have seen increases in both the number of homeless approaches and acceptances (Appendix 3.1 refers). The principal reasons for homeless acceptances tends to be friends or family being unwilling or unable to accommodate (Appendix 3.2 refers), though loss of private rented accommodation is also significant, particularly in 2000/01. Loss of accommodation through relationship breakdown also remains significant.

As a key objective of our Best Value review, we said we would review our homeless, housing register and housing advice services to include particularly:

-  Establishing the optimum service delivery option for the homeless, housing register and housing advice service;
-  Maximising the efficiency of the homeless service.

We have also incorporated the recommendations of the Audit Commission Housing Best Value Inspectorate into our review as appropriate. This has resulted in the following actions:



-  As a result of concerns in service delivery, we intensified monitoring arrangements of the homeless and housing advice services with Ridgehill Housing Association, which improved the efficiency of the homeless service. We have substantially reduced the average time taken to assess accepted cases (Appendix 3.3 refers), and the size of the ongoing homeless caseload (Appendix 3.4 refers). We will seek to further improve performance, particularly in relation to accepted cases, in 2002/03.
-  In early 2002, the Council consulted with our partners concerning the optimum service delivery option for the homeless, housing register and housing advice service. We also undertook market testing as part of the investigation of procurement options. As a result we will provide the full service in-house with effect from 1st October 2002, and we will separately consider the merits of providing all or part of the housing advice service through service agreements with our voluntary sector advice agency partners in the longer term.
-  We have separately reviewed the specification of service standards and we will seek to implement more rigorous standards after the new service is established in October 2002.

The Homelessness Act 2002 has introduced new obligations on local authorities in relation to homelessness and allocations. As a result the provisions affecting the homeless have been incorporated into our policy and practice and we are currently reviewing the Councils Nominations Policy in order to incorporate the provisions regarding allocations. In line with government guidance, we will be producing a homelessness strategy by July 2003.

3.3 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Since August 2000, our use of bed and breakfast temporary accommodation has also increased, though we still consider our use of bed and breakfast is low compared with other similar authorities.





In our strategy, we said we would:


-  Carry out a review into the use of temporary accommodation, including the future use of Council-owned flats above shops;
-  Ensure that all future temporary accommodation is provided within the borough wherever possible.

We have reviewed the future use of Council owned flats above shops. We shall continue to use these for temporary accommodation in order to reduce the need for bed-and-breakfast. However, mindful of our aim to create balanced and sustainable communities we have determined a wider policy in relation to their use. We aim to retain at least about seven flats above shops at any one time for temporary accommodation, but will also embark upon a programme of phased disposal of flats to housing associations for use as permanent affordable housing. This should produce a mix of general needs rented accommodation and low-cost home ownership according to local circumstances. We are currently working with one of our development panel partners on proposals and we will aim to dispose the first phase of properties in the next year.

We have also reviewed the availability of alternative temporary accommodation. We have recognised that so called “annex” accommodation (self-contained temporary accommodation hired on a nightly basis) provides preferable accommodation to bed-and-breakfast with shared facilities, and, working in partnership with private sector providers, we have established 5 units of annex accommodation in Hertsmere. Our review has established bed and breakfast premises in Radlett.



As part of the Action Plan arising from the Best Value Review, and in order to meet our obligations under the Homelessness Act 2002, we will:

-  Continue to seek to establish alternative premises within Hertsmere, in particular through provision of annex type accommodation;
-  Begin discussions with other organisations and agencies (e.g. Hertfordshire County Council Adult Care Services) to try to secure common providers of temporary accommodation in Hertsmere;
-  Seek to reduce the need for temporary accommodation through different approaches to the prevention and management of homelessness as part of provision of the new homeless and housing advice service;
-  Seek proposals to help secure alternatives to bed-and-breakfast as part of selection criteria for choosing new development panel partners;

-  Regularly monitor the numbers in bed-and-breakfast, average length of stay, gross expenditure commitment, and whether premises currently used are in Hertsmere.

3.4 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

We said we would:

-  Develop housing policies on reducing domestic violence that support broader policies within our community safety;
-  Continue to pursue the feasibility of the women's refuge project, which will include either establishing a new stand-alone project, or incorporation into an existing project.

We are delighted that St Albans Womens Refuge, in conjunction with Hightown Praetorian Housing Association, secured Safer Communities Supported Housing Funding to extend their facilities within Hertsmere, and have supported this initiative with resources from our own Local Authority Social Housing Grant. This has enabled them to provide this much-needed facility and enabled us to achieve our strategy aspiration.

3.5 WAITING LISTS AND ALLOCATION POLICIES

Our strategy stated our intention to develop a common application form for the Council's housing register and the waiting lists of Ridgehill and Aldwyck housing associations. This became fully operational in May 2002, which simplifies the process of applying for social housing in Hertsmere and improves our services to our customers.

As a common application form has proved to be feasible, we said that the next step would be to consider as much commonality as possible between the allocations and nominations policies of Ridgehill, Aldwyck and the Council. With this in mind, we are currently reviewing our nominations policy in consultation with all our key partners (including Ridgehill and Aldwyck). We will also be considering the extent to which we wish to develop a common allocation policy and / or a common housing register for the borough.

Draft government guidance on the review of allocation schemes in the light of the Homelessness Act is currently subject to consultation, and final guidance is anticipated in October. Consequently, we will not now aim to conclude the review of our nominations policy until January 2003. With respect to the consultation that we have undertaken so far, we have considered key principles that we would like to underpin our final policy (subject to final government guidance). These are included at Appendix 4.

During our review of our nominations policy we also said we would decide whether we wish to alter the policy to incorporate choice-based principles. Ridgehill have begun a pilot of choice-based lettings within its own waiting list and Aldwyck are also considering a pilot exercise. We will follow the results of these closely, as well as the results of national choice-based pilots in the final review of our policy.

4. SPECIAL HOUSING NEEDS




We said we would seek to ensure a review of the locality planning framework once the review of health services, social services and education services is complete. This is now being undertaken as part of our joint preparation with the County Council for the implementation of our joint statutory responsibility to establish a community strategy and local strategic partnership for Hertsmere, and we will progress this further over the next year.

We also said we would try to develop countywide strategic investment in social housing where appropriate. We consider our joint working with the County Council and Hertfordshire district and borough Councils in preparation for *Supporting People*, and the commissioned County-wide assessment of needs is making good progress towards this. We will also begin to explore a greater degree of cross-boundary partnership working as part of the review of our housing association development panel (section 6.1 refers).

4.1 SUPPORTING PEOPLE

We said we would continue our preparation to ensure that Hertsmere is as fully prepared as possible for the implementation of the *Supporting People* programme in April 2003. The programme will fundamentally change the way that housing-related support for vulnerable people is funded and delivered. Services will be developed within a strategic framework at County level and County will be required to produce a *Supporting People* strategy. Joint working will therefore be crucial to its success. We also said we would consider the possible impact of *Supporting People* in all our plans for new supported housing in the borough.

We have prepared for *Supporting People* in the following ways:

-  We have fully participated in the Hertfordshire *Supporting People* Shadow Commissioning Body set up as a partnership between Hertfordshire County Council and the ten district councils in Hertfordshire. The body is implementing a joint action plan to ensure effective preparation for April 2003, when *Supporting People* is implemented, and we have submitted regular milestone reports to the government.
-  We have established a local consultative forum for Hertsmere involving organisations that provide support and accommodation for vulnerable people in the Borough. The forum shares information regarding the process and is assisting in the development of the strategy for *Supporting People* both as it relates to Hertsmere in particular and Hertfordshire as a whole.
-  We have already begun to co-ordinate provision of new social housing within the shadow commissioning body and we anticipate we will continue to make good progress between now and April 2003. It is likely

that co-ordinated strategic investment will be fully completed during the development of Hertfordshire's *Supporting People* strategy after April 2003.

4.2 MENTAL HEALTH

There is still identified need for further floating support provision for those with mental health difficulties in Borehamwood, and we said we would seek to establish further floating support provision. To date, we have not made progress on this. It will be something that we will reconsider during the development of the *Supporting People* strategy.

4.3 LEARNING DISABILITIES

We said we would continue to explore opportunities to assist people with learning disabilities during the course of this strategy, in partnership with other agencies.

Since our strategy was published, the Department of Health has published the White Paper 'Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century' in March 2001. Its proposals are intended to result in improvements in education, social services, health, employment, housing and support for people with learning disabilities and their families and carers.

We are continuing dialogue with the County Council on progressing our strategy commitments and the aspirations of the White Paper, and we will aim to consider further within the next year during the development of the *Supporting People* strategy (see section 4.1).

4.4 PHYSICAL AND SENSORY DISABILITY

We said we would commit £50,000 LASHG per annum over the duration of our strategy to provide adaptations in housing association stock. The take up of this commitment by housing associations has been limited, but nevertheless 6 adaptations have been completed in this way in the first two years of our strategy, supported by LASHG funding of £43,974, and a further 3 adaptations will be completed in 2002/03, supported by £14,697 LASHG funding. A further £50,000 of LASHG funds is set aside for further adaptations in 2002/03 (Appendices 6.1 and 6.2 refer).

We said we would continue to work with specialist registered social landlords when the need and opportunity arises to develop accommodation for wheelchair users. We have included wheelchair homes in new developments at Blyth Close and Torworth Road (as detailed in Appendices 6.1 and 6.2), and we will continue to work to develop accommodation where appropriate.

We said we would continue to explore shared ownership as a potential housing

solution for owner-occupiers with special needs. This remains a strategy aspiration, though it has not led to any specific action to date.

4.5 FRAIL ELDERLY PEOPLE

We said we would continue to work with Hertfordshire County Council and Ridgehill Housing Association to progress a project for provision of social housing for frail elderly people in the borough. Work has now begun to develop Fountains Court in Brook Road Borehamwood, a 45 unit new build specialised independent accommodation for frail elderly people on the site of a former County Council owned care home. The project has been funded principally through £4.6m in our LASHG programme, and is due to be completed in 2003/04 (Appendices 6.1 and 6.2 refer).

4.6 ASYLUM SEEKERS

We said we would continue to try to ensure that the authorities of the Eastern region work together to meet the short and long term needs of asylum seekers as part of a national strategy. We have continued to attend the East of England Consortium for Asylum Seeker Support and have been instrumental in representing the views of Hertfordshire housing authorities in regional planning for the short and long term needs of asylum seekers. This has included the regional response of the East of England to the government's national dispersal policy for asylum seekers.

4.7 YOUNG PEOPLE

We said we would seek to finalise and publicise the joint protocol for the assessment of young persons to ensure that both the social service authority and housing authority effectively discharge their respective statutory responsibilities. The protocol has been completed and is being actively piloted in Hertsmere. As part of the Hertfordshire-wide preparation for implementation of the Homelessness Act, a common protocol is being considered for all Hertfordshire housing authorities, and we will participate in the development of this.

We said we would continue to work with our partners to establish whether increased supported housing for 16 and 17 year old lone parents is required in the borough. We are working closely with the Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator of Hertsmere Primary Care Trust in establishing a more precise measure of how to meet the needs of the borough in this respect, and will progress this issue within our *Supporting People* strategy (section 4.1 refers).

We also said we would establish whether the extent of housing needs in young people warrant any further specific measures. We are continuing to consider these issues in partnership with Hertsmere Homeless Project, in view of the improved housing advice service that will commence in October 2002, and in response to the Homelessness Act. As part of this, and supported by the results

of the cost-benefit analysis of the results of our housing needs survey, we will establish the feasibility of the foyer project for the borough.

4.8 BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS

In the light of the recommendations from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and with respect to the obligation on all local authorities to produce a race equality statement, the council has improved its monitoring procedures in relation to allocations. Since April 2002 we have monitored the percentage of council nominations to black and minority ethnic households and the percentage of households seeking acceptance as homeless by ethnicity (see Appendix 5).

The *Supporting People* implementation process has demonstrated that there is very little specialist supported housing or housing related support services for people from black and minority ethnic communities. We will therefore be considering the need for such future provision with our partners, within the *Supporting People* framework.

4.9 OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS

Through a partnership approach, we said we would explore possible small scale projects which may address other special housing needs for which solutions are more difficult to define, particularly those which may be able to be provided with the help of our housing association partners.

In partnership with other Hertfordshire local housing authorities, and with Aldwyck Housing Association, we have provided £15,000 of LASHG resources in our current programme to develop cluster unit developments in the St Elizabeth's complex in Much Hadham, for people with severe epilepsy. These were completed in 2001/02 (Appendices 6.1 and 6.2 refer).

We will continue to pay attention to other special housing needs, particularly when encouraging bids for Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund resources, in establishing effective targeting of resources available through the Communities Against Drugs initiative, and in the development of Hertfordshire's *Supporting People* strategy.

5. STOCK CONDITION AND PRIVATE SECTOR POLICY

5.1 STOCK CONDITION

Since writing our original strategy, the Council has acquired new statutory responsibilities with respect to Private Sector Renewal. We are required to prepare a detailed private sector renewal strategy by June 2003. In order to enable us to assess our priorities we need to obtain accurate data and information regarding the condition of the stock in our Borough.

The Council undertook a comprehensive house condition survey in 1996. Best practice guidance recommends updating information every five years. Our first priority, therefore, must be to consider the costs and benefits of a fresh survey upon which subsequent policy decisions can be based. This should include fitness standards, energy efficiency, decent homes standards, empty homes and disability needs.

Furthermore, we consider it a priority to use our strategic function in order to encourage social landlords to develop an investment strategy to ensure that social housing meets the Decent Home standards by 2010.

5.2 GRANTS

In view of the Regulatory Reform Order, we aim to review our eligibility criteria for Home Repair Assistance Grants by May 2003.

5.3 PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

We said we would endeavour to develop closer links with the private rented sector in Hertsmere, both to help to establish the needs that exist within it and to develop the standards that meet with the Government's priorities.

As part of the Action Plan arising from the Best Value review of our housing service, we established a borough wide licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation in April 2002. We have also made progress towards establishing a Landlord's Forum. The first meeting took place in May 2002 and we hope this will continue if sufficient interest can be engendered. Once the forum has become more established, we hope to broaden its membership and develop standards that complement government priorities.

We also said we would be seeking to explore links with the Tenancy Deposit Scheme as part of our closer working with the private rented sector. In view of the requirements under the Regulatory Reform Order, we will be revisiting these links as part of our wider strategy for private sector renewal.

We will consider future development of the Landlords Forum, including options for a Rent Deposit scheme together with its resource implications.

5.4 HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT

We said we would commit a further £300,000 of LASHG resources over the duration of this strategy to continue the programme of energy efficiency work in social housing stock carried out by Working Herts. Take-up of resources has been slower than we would have liked, but nevertheless we have committed £124,000 so far, and works to 730 homes have been completed in the first two years. We will aim to see works to at least a further 159 homes in 2002/03 (Appendices 6.1 and 6.2 refer).

We have also provided approximately 3,500 energy saving light bulbs to older persons and those in receipt of income-related benefits free of charge. Furthermore over 40% of private homes in the borough have received a mailing from the Warmer Home Greener Herts Scheme over the past two years, with many taking advantage of the discounts available. The scheme offers massive discounts to private residents wishing to improve the energy efficiency of their home by installing cavity wall, roof, and pipe insulation measures. Funds have been secured from HEF (£1,400) for Hertsmere to launch a solar energy club, where the fuel rich can take advantage of discounted prices for water heating panels. We have also worked with health professionals to inform our residents about the grants available to assist in addressing fuel poverty issues and preventing ill health. Finally, we have committed £21,000 in our current LASHG programme for Working Herts to undertake a pilot project installing smoke detectors in Aldwyck properties (Appendices 6.1 and 6.2 refer).

As part of the annual HIP submission, we said we would submit a progress report on achieving the Council's agreed strategy and on any new initiatives planned. An updated energy strategy document was enclosed with the Council's HECA return.

6. RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS




6.1 LOCAL AUTHORITY SOCIAL HOUSING GRANT PROGRAMME

Whilst our limited LASHG funds last, we said we would continue to support schemes, which run across a wide spectrum, including works to existing properties as well as new acquisitions.




Appendix 6.1 details the expenditure on our LASHG programme, and Appendix 6.2 details the outcomes planned or achieved. Between April 2000 and March 2003, we will expect to see 260 additional affordable homes delivered through our LASHG programme (164 through new building), and LASHG-funded improvement works completed to 898 existing affordable homes. We will have provided LASHG totalling £15.19m to these projects. By March 2002, we were well on our way to achieving this target - 134 additional affordable homes had been completed (52 through new build), and improvement works had been completed to 736 existing affordable homes.

We have also a number of projects which will not complete within the period of our current strategy. If all these projects come to fruition will deliver a further 146 affordable homes, all through new build. One of the most significant sites is the Council-owned site of the former Hartspring leisure site in Bushey, where we have entered into partnership with Paddington Churches Housing Association to develop at least 30 units of affordable housing. Whilst this will not be completed until 2002/03, we will make progress in its development during the final year of our current strategy. Another key project is the new accommodation for frail elderly people to be provided by Ridgehill Housing Association in Brook Road, Borehamwood (section 4.5 refers).

We said we would continually review our LASHG opportunities over the duration of this strategy, and plan with our housing association partners innovative ways of how we can continue to maximise the supply of social housing as our LASHG resources decrease. In 2001, we commissioned a consultant to review the level of our remaining LASHG reserves (upon which our existing LASHG programme is based). As part of the Action Plan arising out of our Best Value review, the Council's Executive adopted a six point strategy to replace declining LASHG reserves:

-  Efficient "cash flow" of capital receipts through the LASHG route prior to their application for other purposes, to ensure we maximise LASHG opportunities.
-  Maximising direct funded Social Housing Grant available directly from the Housing Corporation to support projects, particularly through sensitivity to the Corporation's priorities in the future, and through partnering housing associations with whom the Corporation has confidence to invest.
-  Involving the Housing Corporation and Hertfordshire County Council in the selection process for reviewing the Council's Housing Association

Development Panel in order to ensure an effective partnership approach, and ensuring that the process rigorously tests each association's ability to develop new social housing with declining LASHG reserves.

-  Considering partnership working to a far greater extent than currently, particularly with adjacent local authorities, but also perhaps with consortia of associations, or with the private sector.
-  Making the maximum opportunity of bidding for specific programmes that form part of Government policy.
-  Considering reappraisal of the affordable housing policies that support the Council's Local Plan, and in particular seek greater contribution through planning obligations towards provision of affordable housing. This will need to be considered alongside the Government's recently published consultation paper on a "tariff"-based approach to planning obligations, which, if implemented, will require a review of the Council's existing policy.

The Council has adopted new supplementary planning guidance on the future provision of affordable housing in Hertsmere (section 6.2 refers), which has been subject to full public consultation (including our existing housing association development panel). This sets out our expectation of delivering new affordable housing through the planning process with potentially reduced LASHG.

We said we would continue to monitor rents on new schemes, and will take account of Housing Corporation guidance in respect of rents charged and rent increases in our future LASHG awards. We have continued to seek rent at or below Housing Corporation benchmark rents for 2000/01 and 2001/02. New proposals for rent reform will mean that from April 2002 rents on new affordable housing have been set at target rent levels, with reduced local discretion.

The government has published the Local Government Bill, taking forward the capital finance aspects of the Local Government White Paper. Of particular interest to us is the government's draft proposals concerning redistribution of capital receipts from debt-free authorities. Such an arrangement will have an impact upon our LASHG programme, but the precise extent of this impact is difficult to judge at this stage. Together with other debt-free councils, we are assessing the impact of the government's proposals, and we will seek to ensure that any adverse impact upon our LASHG programme is minimised.

6.2 LAND AVAILABILITY, PLANNING POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES

As part of our six point strategy to replace declining LASHG reserves, we undertook to consider reappraisal of the affordable housing policies that support the Council's Local Plan, and in particular seek greater contribution through planning obligations towards provision of affordable housing. This will need to

be considered alongside the Government's recently published consultation paper on a "tariff"-based approach to planning obligations, which, if implemented, will require a review of the Council's existing policy.


As stated in Section 2, the information from our housing needs survey has had an instrumental role to play in formulating planning policies and objectives. It has informed the new Supplementary Planning Guidance adopted in April 2002, which provides a practical framework for the delivery of affordable housing in the borough, within the context of national, strategic and local planning policy.


In 2001/02, 71 new dwellings were completed for affordable housing (24% of all completions). Fifteen of these were secured through negotiations with the developer, as a percentage of a larger development. The majority of the remaining dwellings were also secured with a planning agreement, as these developments have been allowed to progress with reduced car parking provision that would not have permitted for open market dwellings. A further 103 affordable units are currently under construction.

6.3 UNDEROCCUPATION

We said we would continue to match fund the Tenants Under-occupation scheme for the duration of this strategy, and up till now we have done so. 25 homes have been released through the scheme in 2000/01, and 13 in 2001/02.

We said we would, together with our housing association partners, carry out further analysis of the results of our housing needs survey with a view to establishing if there are more effective measures that we can take to reduce under-occupation of social housing stock in the borough:

 In 2001/02 we piloted a version of the Under-occupation scheme tailored to assist older persons under-occupying who wish to move to smaller accommodation in conjunction with Ridgehill Housing Association. Four homes have been released in this way so far;

 The review of our Nominations Policy (section 3.5 refers) is considering a major revision to give increased priority to housing association tenants currently occupying properties in high demand. This should assist in enabling us to make more efficient use of our social housing stock.

6.4 LOW-COST HOME OWNERSHIP

We said we would continue to work with Ridgehill to progress proposals to secure Housing Corporation Innovation and Good Practice grant money to conduct a joint-funded feasibility study into "intermediate" market housing along green paper principles. The report resulting from the study was published in 2002².

² *Housing the Next Generation: Affordable Housing in Pressured Areas (Ridgehill Housing Association)*

We are actively considering low-cost home ownership to meet our housing needs, in particular in the development of the former Hartspring leisure site in Bushey (section 6.1 refers).

6.5 EMPLOYMENT




We said we would continue to work with Working Herts to pursue opportunities that will complement the Council's Housing strategy and the broader social objectives of the company. Our programme continues to support the energy improvement works carried out by Working Herts on behalf of Ridgehill and Aldwyck Housing Associations. In addition, we have committed £21,000 in our current LASHG programme for Working Herts to undertake a pilot project installing smoke detectors in Aldwyck properties (section 5.4 refers).

6.6 KEYWORKERS

We recognise that affordability of housing in Hertsmere is becoming increasingly significant and is having a detrimental impact upon the recruitment and retention of key workers.

We have well-established initiatives in the borough to meet the needs of key workers, in particular our key worker estate of 55 properties in Borehamwood managed by North British Housing Association. The estate can accommodate 55 households, through assured tenancies and intermediate market rents. In addition, the estate supports our job mobility scheme, providing assured shorthold tenancies to people moving into the borough whilst they make arrangements to sell their existing property.

We remain committed to assisting key workers to obtain accommodation in the area. We welcome the initiatives that have been established by Ridgehill Housing Association with the Police and the Primary Care Trust. These are:

-  A Starter Home Initiative with Hertfordshire Constabulary which will assist 47 first time buyers by allocating them a grant to enable them to purchase a property on the open market;
-  An agreement with Hertfordshire Constabulary whereby Ridgehill purchases large three/four bedroom properties for multi-occupancy purposes, and lets fully furnished rooms to new recruits to enable them to live near to where they are stationed. Ridgehill currently has 7 properties for this use;
-  A new initiative with the Primary Care Trust where Ridgehill lets accommodation to health workers. Two people have already been assisted and there are plans to expand the scheme.

Following Ridgehill's report into affordability, we will continue to research this issue in order to identify ways to address the issue within the confines of our





resources. The results of this research will inform our new housing strategy that will be published next year.

6.7 COMMUNITY SAFETY

We said we would continue to develop the work of the Racial Harassment Group within a wider forum, and consider establishing additional staffing resources, in partnership with other agencies, to achieve this. This has been achieved, and a joint funded part-time project worker has now been appointed to develop the work of the Group.

7. CONSULTATION

We are committed to an ongoing process of consultation with our partners and stakeholders to help to develop and monitor our strategy. For example, we have detailed how various consultation processes have helped us to develop:

-  Proposed improvements to our homeless and housing advice service (section 3.2 refers);
-  Proposed improvements to our nominations policy (section 3.5 refers);
-  Implementation of *Supporting People* (section 4.1 refers);
-  New Supplementary Planning Guidance on affordable housing (section 6.1 refers).

We said we would promote more actively the Council's housing strategy to residents in the borough. We have now published our Housing Strategy on our website to help to achieve this, and we will similarly publish this update on the website.

Over the next year we will begin a new programme of wide-ranging consultation as we prepare our new housing strategy for the period 2003-2006. We will publish our new strategy in July 2003.

NOTE:

If you have any comments or would like a further copy of this document or our Housing Strategy, please contact:

*Jane Hawkswell
Housing Policy Officer
Housing Services Unit
Hertsmere Borough Council
Civic Offices, Elstree Way
Borehamwood
Herts WD6 1WA*

Tel: 020 8207 7538

E-mail: jane.hawkswell@hertsmere.gov.uk

8. APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 **BEST VALUE ACTION PLAN**
- Appendix 2 **HOUSING REGISTER ANALYSIS**
- 2.1 Housing Register Live Applications – Total on Register
 - 2.2 Housing register Live Applications by Bedroom Need
 - 2.3 Housing Register Live Applications by area of need
- Appendix 3 **HOMELESS APPROACHES AND ACCEPTANCES ANALYSIS**
- 3.1 Homeless Approaches and Acceptances
 - 3.2 Reasons for Homeless Acceptances
 - 3.3 Average Time Taken to Assess Accepted Homeless Cases
 - 3.4 Percentage of all Homeless Applications assessed within 33 days
- Appendix 4 **NOMINATIONS POLICY KEY PRINCIPLES**
- Appendix 5 **BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC MONITORING OF NOMINATIONS AND HOMELESS ACCEPTANCES**
- 5.1 Applications for Housing by Ethnic Origin (from April 2002)
 - 5.2 Homeless Applications Decisions by Ethnic Origin (Quarter ending March 31 2002)
- Appendix 6 **LOCAL AUTHORITY SOCIAL HOUSING GRANT ANALYSIS**
- 6.1 Local Authority Social Housing Grant programme – Expenditure
 - 6.2 Local Authority Social Housing Grant programme – Outcomes