

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY CARE

TO:	COUNCIL		
DATE:	13 TH OCTOBER 2009	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	FIRM FOUNDATIONS - READING BOROUGH COUNCIL'S HOUSING STRATEGY 2009-14		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR EDWARDS	PORTFOLIO:	HOUSING
SERVICE:	STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 Firm Foundations is the Council's draft housing strategy for the period 2009-14. An associated action plan details activity to deliver the Council's strategic objectives.
- 1.2 An Executive Summary of the Strategy is attached at **Appendix 1**. Full copies of the draft strategy, action plan, equalities impact assessment and consultation report have been placed in the Group Rooms and on the Reading Borough Council Website.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That 'Firm Foundations' be adopted as Reading Borough Council's Housing Strategy for 2009-14.
- 2.2 That the action plan associated with the Strategy be endorsed, and reviewed on an annual basis.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

National Policy

- 3.1 In their guidance *The Strategic Housing Role of Local Authorities: Powers and Duties* the department of Communities and Local Government identified the following five key elements that comprise the strategic housing role:
- assess and plan for the current and future housing needs of the local population across all tenures
 - make the best use of the existing housing stock
 - plan and facilitate new supply
 - plan and commission housing support services which link homes and housing support services
 - work in partnership to secure effective housing and neighbourhood management on an on-going basis¹
- 3.2 The white paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*² emphasises the ‘place-shaping’ role of the strategic housing function - this is about ‘making the place work’ - improving services, and connections between services, in an area or neighbourhood, to make life better for citizens and create sustainable communities.
- 3.3 2007’s Housing green paper: *Homes for the future; more affordable, more sustainable*³ and subsequent *Housing and Regeneration Bill*⁴ outlines the government’s housing objectives including increasing supply and the delivery of 3 million new homes by 2020.
- 3.4 More recently the publication of *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: a National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society*⁵ has set a clear expectation that housing our ageing population should be part of our mainstream housing agenda. A recurring theme in recent guidance is the need to invest in upgrading and maximising utilisation of private sector stock to reduce the otherwise inevitable impact on supply.

Regional Priorities

- 3.5 The *Regional Housing Strategy for the South East*⁶, linked to the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategy, sets out three priorities:
- Build more houses
 - Bring decent housing in reach of people on low income
 - Improve the quality of new housing and existing stock

Local Priorities

¹ DCLG (Sept 2008) - *The Strategic Housing Role of Local Authorities: Powers and Duties*

² DCLG (October 2006) - *Strong and Prosperous Communities - The Local Government White Paper*

³ DCLG (July 2007) - *Homes for the future; more affordable, more sustainable*

⁴ Housing of Lords and House of Commons (2008) – *Housing and Regeneration Bill*

⁵ DCLG (February 2008) - *Life Time Neighbourhoods: a National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society*

⁶ South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA Ltd) on behalf of the South East England Regional Housing Board (2008). – *Regional Housing Strategy for the South East*

3.6 These strategic housing priorities are reflected in Reading Borough Council's *Sustainable Communities Strategy* chapter on Decent and Affordable Housing:

- To increase the overall supply of new housing, including affordable housing in all tenures
- To improve conditions in the existing housing stock across all tenures, to at least the Government's 'Decent Homes' standard
- To prevent and reduce homelessness, particularly amongst families with children and people sleeping rough.

3.7 Within the Sustainable Communities Strategy the vision for decent and affordable housing in Reading is as follows:

"Reading's residents will have a range of attractive, affordable and realistic housing choices available to them. The housing stock itself will be safe, secure, and environmentally sustainable and this, together with a range of high-quality housing services, will make a positive contribution to people's lives, both at an individual, personal level and also in terms of their wish to live in thriving, stable neighbourhoods. At the broadest level, ensuring that Reading has a well-housed population will make a very significant contribution to the success of the local economy.⁷"

4. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Consultation on a Housing Strategy 'Issues and Options' paper was launched at the end of September 2008 and involved staff, local councillors, residents, services users and tenants, voluntary organisations, service providers and other stakeholders including the private sector. Consultation was completed via various mediums including:

- A formal stakeholder consultation launch event
- An informal drop in session for the public
- Presentations to established forums
- Electronic distribution
- Distribution of a hard copy document in public areas.
- Reading Borough Council's Website

4.2 The draft Housing Strategy has been informed by feedback from the consultation, combined with an extensive needs analysis, best practice research and direction from the national and regional policy agenda.

4.3 In May/June 2009 the Council consulted on the detail of the draft strategy and proposed delivery mechanisms. This included, but was not limited to:

- Electronic distribution to all partners, stakeholders and voluntary/community groups.
- Presentations at key stakeholder events.

⁷Reading Borough Council (2008) - *Reading 2020, Shaping Reading's Future*

- In partnership with the Directorate of Education and Children's Services, who were consulting on their Children's and Young People's plan, there were display stands at various events advertising the consultations. This includes events as part of the children's festival and targeted stalls in Broad Street and Broad Street Mall.
 - 3500 Joint leaflets were distributed to advertise the consultation.
 - A public drop in event was held to discuss the draft strategy.
 - The draft strategy was available on the web and was possible to respond to the consultation electronically. It was also possible to pick up hard copies from key access points in the town or to request a hard copy to be posted to an address
 - The consultation was covered in the local press and on local radio following a Reading Borough Council press release
- 4.4 The strategy and associated action plan has been developed with input from all directorates within the Council via the Housing Strategy Steering Group, themed sub-groups and focused working groups when necessary. The Strategic Housing Partnership Board (SHPB), comprising of officers of the Council, cross party member representation and representatives from local and regional agencies, has acted as a critical friend and high level steering group overseeing the development of the Strategy. The SHPB will monitor and support the delivery and implementation of the Housing Strategy for Reading and associated action plans once the strategy is launched, and will undertake an annual review of the implementation plan.
- 4.5 Private rented sector housing, which makes up 27.7% of the dwellings in Reading, has also been the focus of an out of cycle scrutiny process jointly requested by HHCC and Environment Scrutiny Panels. The scrutiny process was broken down in to two parts - the development of a background paper for panel members leading to a very well attended question and answer session between officers and members, followed by a consultation evening with members of the public. Recommendations from this scrutiny exercise were reported to Cabinet in April 2009 and the response to the recommendations was discussed at Cabinet on the 1st June 2009. The officer report suggested that the administration accepted all of the recommendations but with caveats against two of them to ensure realistic delivery of the require actions. Cabinet agreed this recommendation.

5. THE PROPOSAL

- 5.1 The draft Housing Strategy, Firm Foundations, is proposed for adoption as the live housing strategy for Reading for the period 2009 - 14.
- 5.2 In comparison to the 2004 Housing Strategy Update, the Housing Strategy 2009/14 will increase the strategic focus on a number of key areas:
- Increasing the range and supply of specialist accommodation for older people and disabled adults, reflecting both an aging population and a market shift away from residential care towards supported living options

- Improving conditions and standards in the private sector with a clear preventative agenda
- Recognise the role of housing in building community capacity
- Increase the information available to residents of all tenures

5.3 The strategic objectives of the Housing Strategy 2009-14 are:

Supply: Meeting Housing Need in Reading

- Ensure the sustainable delivery of new build housing to meet identified needs whilst achieving best use of available land
- Increase the availability of appropriate specialist accommodation for those that need it
- Make best use of existing housing stock within the town.

Stock Condition: Ensuring good quality homes and neighbourhoods

- Increase the number of properties meeting the 'Decent Homes Standard' in all tenures and support people to stay safe and comfortable in their homes
- Improve and maintain standards of neighbourhoods and identify areas for neighbourhood renewal

Housing Services: 'Housing is more than bricks and mortar'

- Ensure strong neighbourhood management across all housing sectors
- Develop homelessness prevention services and reduce rough sleeping as detailed in the Homelessness Strategy 2008 -2013
- Increase and improve the advice and support for residents and landlords.
- Develop communities and improve community cohesion and engagement

Sub-Regional Working

- Maximise cross-boundary working to collectively meet the needs of the region

Other Options Considered

5.4 That Reading Borough Council does not publish a Housing Strategy.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

6.1 The Decent and Affordable Housing chapter within the Sustainable Communities Strategy sets out the following strategic priorities:

- To increase the overall supply of new housing, including affordable housing in all tenures

- To improve conditions in the existing housing stock across all tenures, to at least the Government's 'Decent Homes' standard
- To prevent and reduce homelessness, particularly amongst families with children and people sleeping rough.

6.2 In addition to the priorities within the Decent and Affordable Housing Chapter, additional priorities of the SCS and LAA that relate to this agenda are:

A Fairer Reading for all

- Reduce inequality between Reading's neighbourhoods
- Reduce levels of poverty, particularly where it affects children.
- Develop a strong sense of inclusive citizenship.

Children and Young People

- To enhance emotional well being

Cleaner and Greener Environments

- Address the issues of Climate Change and air quality
- Maintain and improve the quality of streets and open spaces throughout the Borough

Healthy People and Lifestyles

- To enable more people in less affluent areas to make healthy lifestyle choices and so improve their health
- We must help vulnerable people to live at home in order to improve their quality of life

Safer and Stronger Communities

- Work together and with local communities
- Work with partners to develop preventative services, including drug and alcohol services

Thriving economy and skills

- Supporting a thriving economy

6.3 In order to deliver the above priorities of the Sustainable Communities Strategy in partnership with all areas of Reading Borough Council, the Housing Strategy is aligned with the follow strategic documents:

- Draft Children and Young People Plan
- Transport Strategy
- Cultural Strategy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy
- Community Safety Strategy
- Domestic Violence Strategy
- Empty Homes Strategy
- Open Space Strategy
- Supporting People Strategy

- Local Development Framework (in particular the Development Management Document and the Section 106 SPG)
- Climate Change Strategy
- Adult Social Care Strategies
- HRA Business Plan
- Asset Management Plan
- Emerging Anti Poverty Strategy

6.4 Further detailed action plans will derive from the Housing Strategy, for example a 'Fuel Poverty Strategy' and a 'Student Accommodation Action Plan'.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 Extensive consultation was completed as part of the development of the Housing Strategy. This was delivered via two phases with 127 responses received. For details please see the consultation report which is an appendix of the strategy document.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The statutory guidance, *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*⁸ published by Communities and Local Government, on 9 July 2008, reaffirms that housing is at the heart of place shaping and encourages local authorities to take full and proper account of housing as part of the strategic vision for the area. There is flexibility as to how this is achieved but the strategy contributes to us meeting this obligation.

8.2 Any legal implications that may occur as a result of implementing separate actions within the action plan will be addressed at the appropriate time by the relevant lead officer.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Representatives from the finance department have been involved in the development of the Housing Strategy and considered any overarching financial implications.

9.2 Any financial implications that may occur as a result of implementing separate actions within the action plan will be addressed at the appropriate time by the relevant lead officer.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Firm Foundations - Reading Borough Council's Housing Strategy 2009-14

10.2 Firm Foundations - Reading Borough Council's Housing Strategy 2009-14 - Executive Summary

⁸ CLG (2008) – *Creating, Strong Safe and Prosperous Communities*

- 10.3 Firm Foundations - Reading Borough Council's Housing Strategy 2009-14 - Action Plan
- 10.4 Firm Foundations - Reading Borough Council's Housing Strategy 2009-14 - Consultation Report

Firm Foundations

Reading Borough Council
Housing Strategy

2009-2014

Executive Summary

DRAFT

Foreword

"I am delighted to introduce Firm Foundations - Reading Borough Council's draft Housing Strategy for 2009-14.

Housing is fundamental to all residents of Reading regardless of income, age or location. Good housing is the foundation to health, education, safe and sustainable communities, green environments and a thriving population. We in the local authority are committed to ensuring that everybody has access to decent and affordable accommodation. It remains a priority both nationally and locally and with the Housing Strategy 2009-2014; Reading Borough Council is leading the way to ensuring the delivery of quality services to meet the housing requirements of our communities.

Since the production of our last housing strategy, Reading has grown into one of the most important towns in the country, highlighted by its recognition as a 'Diamond for Investment and Growth', and strongly influences the prosperity of the South East region. Reading is a clear urban centre of the Thames Valley and even in these challenging economic times, Reading is in an enviably robust position to continue to thrive. However this expansion and development does not come without its challenges; it is critical that all residents are supported to make the most of their opportunities.

Housing is about more than physical structures; it extends beyond bricks and mortar and into the heart of all residents, regardless if they are homeowners or tenants that make up our local community. The transition from house to home is rooted in quality of life. In recognition of this, the draft Housing Strategy seeks to address the challenges of delivering a sustainable supply of accommodation; improving the condition of our current stock; and reviewing the services needed to support people to live confidently in properties and areas that they are proud of.

In developing this draft, we have engaged in a variety of ways with those who live and work in Reading. We have sought to work with our partners to identify the objectives that reflect the concerns and priorities of all those organisations and individuals with an interest in the future of housing in Reading. However, we now invite further comments on our proposals to help us set our priorities for the next five years and frame an action plan to deliver these.

We know that by improving the environment in which our residents live, we will create a brighter future for communities across Reading. I am looking forward to our vision for decent and affordable housing being turned into a reality."

Deborah Edwards - Lead Councillor for Housing

Introduction

In 1999, Reading City 2020 set out a bold vision for the town. By the year 2020, the area would be the capital of the Thames Valley, it would be a city for all, and it would provide a good quality of life for people of every age and background who chose it to live, work or visit.

Since this time, Reading has continued to grow in regional importance. In turn, the town has evolved to meet the challenges inherent within this newfound status.

A double-edged sword...

Reading's prosperity is only one part of the picture. The success of the town, with its strong buoyant economy, masks wider social issues. Reading faces many of the challenges of the inner city and has more in common with some London Borough's than the rural areas around it. It faces the challenges of neighbourhood renewal and relative deprivation and there is a significant disparity between Reading's most affluent and poorest neighbourhoods in terms of health, skills, unemployment, fear of crime and poverty.

Looking ahead: building firm foundations...

In 2008, a new Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) was published; *Reading 2020, Shaping Reading's Future*⁹ and the vision for the town remained the same. The strategy promotes the continued growth of Reading while recognising that this growth must be sustainable and inclusive, to build prosperous and cohesive communities going forward.

The 'Decent and Affordable Housing' chapter within the SCS reflects the national and regional priorities in relation to housing. The priorities within this chapter are:

- To increase the overall supply of new housing, including affordable housing in all tenures
- To improve conditions in the existing housing stock across all tenures to at least the Government's 'Decent Homes' standard
- To prevent and reduce homelessness, particularly among families with children and people sleeping rough

To maintain and develop the place-shaping role of Reading Borough Council, it is vital that the local authority continues to provide appropriate housing and environments to support the economic growth of the town, in a way

1 Reading Borough Council (2008) - *Reading 2020, Shaping Reading's Future*

that is sustainable for the future. The housing requirements of all residents must be recognised. However, the housing needs of residents that are vulnerable or on a low income must continue to be a priority.

From theory to practice...

Reflecting this commitment throughout, the Housing Strategy 2009/14 builds on the 2004 Housing Strategy Update to increase the strategic focus across a number of key areas. This includes a drive to:

- Increase the range and supply of specialist accommodation for older people and disabled adults, reflecting both an ageing population and a market shift away from residential care to supporting more people to live independently in the community
- Improve conditions and standards in the private housing sector with a clear preventative agenda. This will improve the health and safety of residents, and environmental sustainability of these properties
- Recognise the role of housing in building community capacity with a continuing focus on holistic neighbourhood regeneration, including physical, social and economic factors
- Increase the information available to residents of all tenures, offering people more choice and control

Translating these targeted outcomes into practical steps, Reading Borough Council's Housing Strategy 2009-2014 sets out ten strategic objectives. When combined, these objectives will enable the delivery of the vision for decent and affordable Housing set out for the town in the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

Under each objective, in addition to the context and evidence explaining the importance of the action required, a series of delivery mechanisms are also listed. These outline how the objective will be implemented and achieved. Each objective is summarised below and outlined in full in the Housing Strategy 2009/14.

Supply: Meeting the housing requirements in Reading

Strategic Objective 1:

Ensure the sustainable delivery of new build housing to meet identified needs whilst achieving best use of available land.

The *South East Plan*¹⁰ sets a challenging development target for Reading of 611 new units of accommodation per year until 2026. As part of delivering these targets, the Planning Policy relating to section 106 agreements will be reviewed. This process will incorporate the amount of social rented accommodation that needs to be provided as part of the affordable housing contribution. The demand for housing in the town is high and as such, a targeted 50% of new housing development will be used for affordable housing. Within this demand, there is an evidenced need for an increased supply of large family units for social rent.

Processes will be completed to ensure that new developments adhere to:

- Community development objectives
- Reading Borough Council's Climate Change Strategy¹¹
- Reading Borough Council's *Local Transport Plan*¹²

In addition, in line with recent legislative changes, Reading Borough Council will investigate all mechanisms for delivering affordable housing within the town. Part of this will include appraising options for new delivery vehicles such as local housing companies to facilitate Local Authority-led new build.

¹⁰ South East England Regional Assembly (2009) – *South East Plan*

¹¹ Reading Borough Council (2009) – *Climate Change Strategy*

¹² Reading Borough Council (2006) – *Local Transport Plan*

Strategic Objective 2:

Increase the availability of appropriate specialist accommodation for those that need it

To meet the challenges of an ageing population and to offer local residents a real choice about their housing and care as they grow older, the Council is committed to increasing the range and availability of accommodation for older people that will meet their future needs. Meeting this demand will require the delivery of 240 Beds of Extra Care Housing and additional services to support people to remain living independently in their own homes. There is also an identified need to increase the availability of supported living accommodation for disabled adults and improve transition planning to support the needs of disabled children as they move into adult services.

Again, planning policy will be reviewed to ensure that developments reflect 'Lifetimes Homes' standards and there is evidenced need to increase the supply of wheelchair-accessible properties for social rent in the town.

Strategic Objective 3:

Make best use of existing housing stock within the town.

As stated above there is a high level of housing need in the town. To meet this effectively, it is imperative that alternative mechanisms for increasing the supply of housing are implemented in parallel to new developments. The growth of the town's private rented sector (comprising 27% of the housing market - more than twice the national average) provides an additional choice and enables Reading Borough Council to facilitate the use of all housing options across all tenures for those on a low income.

Equally, in an area where housing is in high demand, each property is a critical resource as outlined in the *Empty Homes Strategy 2008-11*¹³ where there is a clear focus on increasing the number of empty properties brought back into use through Council intervention.

Within this, it is recognised that the Local Authority has a responsibility to make the best use of social housing within the town. With continuous pressure on the large family-sized units for social rent, creative options will be explored to try and reduce this demand, including options to reduce under-occupation. A review will be completed in relation to reallocating properties that have been previously adapted for disabled tenants.

¹³ Reading Borough Council (2008) – *Empty Homes Strategy 2008-11*

Stock condition: Ensuring Good Quality Houses and Neighbourhoods

Strategic Objective 4:

Increase the number of properties meeting the 'Decent Homes Standard' in all tenures and support people to stay safe and comfortable in their homes.

It has long been recognised that there are links between poor housing and poor health. Caused by poor maintenance of the building, ineffectual heating systems, fuel poverty or a combination of all these factors, cold and damp properties can lead to a number of serious health conditions. Reading Borough Council is on track to ensure that all Local Authority-owned properties meet a 'Decent Homes Plus' standard by the end of financial year 2010/11. However, the greatest concern in these terms is the private sector, and more specifically, older owner-occupiers on low incomes and parts of the private rented sector.

It has been identified that an increase in, and improved access to, information on property improvement assistance in the private sector is necessary. As such, the commitment to supporting property owners, landlords and tenants to age-proof and improve existing stock via the *Private Sector Renewal Policy*¹⁴ continues to be a priority. A strategy regarding energy and thermal efficiency and tackling fuel poverty (including a reduction in carbon emission - a LAA target) will be developed, building on the significant programme of activity in place.

The risk of trips, falls and fires increase with poorly maintained properties; reducing this risk could in turn reduce avoidable hospital admissions, injuries and deaths. Falls prevention is particularly important in maintaining the independence and safety of older people. Therefore, it is a clear priority to further develop targeted prevention activities to reduce accidents and hazards in the home, with a focus on older or vulnerable residents. At the same time, a cross-service review of the use of Disabled Facilities Grant will be completed.

Running parallel to activities designed to support people to live safely and independently in their homes, powers are available to the Local Authority to take enforcement action against landlords. Additional resources have been allocated to enable an increased number of inspections and enforcement work relating to hazards and poor standards of accommodation within the private rented sector, with a particular focus on houses of multiple occupation (HMO). There will also be a focus on increasing the number of HMO that are licensed.

¹⁴Reading Borough Council (2007) - *Reading Borough Council Housing Renewal Policy (Private Sector)*

Strategic Objective 5

Improve and maintain standards of neighbourhoods and identify areas for neighbourhood renewal

Reading Borough Council recognises that the external appearance of a property and the quality of its surrounding area are critical to maintaining a positive impression to those living, visiting and working in the locality. Anxiety about areas experiencing high levels of crime or anti-social behaviour and vandalism can have a detrimental effect on an individual or family unit. A poorly maintained area will lead to further neglect, vandalism and reduced pride in local neighbourhoods.

Therefore there will be an increase in enforcement against properties that are adversely affecting the amenity of an area, coordinated via a cross-service 'Environment Enforcement Group' that will be established to ensure a joined-up approach to these issues.

To support this endeavour even further, in areas of Social Housing, initiatives will be undertaken to improve external areas. The Housing Service has established a new 'Decent Neighbourhood Fund' with the aim of instigating the process of improving local Reading Borough Council-owned estate areas. To compliment this approach, an Estates Capacity Study will be completed in relation to council-owned land including opportunities for social renewal.

Housing Services: 'Housing is more than bricks and mortar'

Strategic Objective 6

Ensure strong neighbourhood management across all housing sectors

As outlined above, Reading contains a high level of private rented sector accommodation as well as social housing managed by a number of different landlords. Reading Borough Council is committed to ensuring that all neighbourhoods throughout Reading are safe and attractive places to live, regardless of tenure and landlord.

Therefore, the importance of supporting the delivery of the Crime and Disorder Partnership's *Community Safety Strategy*¹⁵ is recognised in this Housing Strategy. In areas where properties are predominantly Local Authority-owned, the Housing Service will be continue to drive up the standards of management.

An imbalance between supply and demand in the private rented sector means that even those landlords with a poor reputation do not struggle to find tenants, especially those on a low income with little choice available to them. Standards and requirements are set out for landlords in law but some, due to ignorance, inability or wilful neglect, fail to meet them. Additional resources have been allocated to appropriate teams within Reading Borough Council to enable them to:

- Proactively engage with PRS landlords
- Review the feasibility and benefits of re-launching an accreditation scheme in the private rented sector
- Review the feasibility and benefits of introducing additional or selective licensing to houses of multiple occupation that do not meet mandatory licensing requirements

As Reading is a town with two Universities within its boundaries, resulting in 1.9% of the dwellings been used as student accommodation, Reading Borough Council will develop a Student Accommodation action plan in partnership with Reading and Thames Valley Universities. This will focus on both supporting students to access decent accommodation and also reduce any negative impact concentrations of student housing may have on the local community.

¹⁵ Reading Borough Council (2008) - *Community Safety Strategy*

Strategic Objective 7:

Develop homelessness prevention services and reduce rough sleeping as detailed in the Homelessness Strategy 2008 -2013¹⁶

This objective will be delivered via implementation of *Reading Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*. The key themes within that strategy are as follows:

- Preventing vulnerable adults becoming homeless
- Preventing families and young people becoming homeless
- Preventing homelessness arising from domestic abuse
- Strengthening partnerships to prevent homelessness
- Moving away from rough sleeping
- Accessing affordable housing

Strategic Objective 8

Increase and improve the advice and support for residents and landlords

As outlined in the *Homeless Strategy 2008-13¹⁷*, a review will be completed of the floating support provision available to residents and those in temporary accommodation. This will enable Reading Borough Council to build on current services to help tenants and landlords maintain private sector tenancies. It is also a priority to improve the understanding of residents, specialist clients, carers and support staff in relation to all housing options available to themselves and any person they may be supporting. This includes increasing the publicity, access and availability of housing, advice and options for older people (including 'Self funders').

Strategic Objective 9

Develop communities and improve community cohesion and engagement

In recognition of the wide-ranging impact that a person's housing situation has on their life, priorities within the Housing Strategy will overlap with a number of other key strategic documents. Therefore, the Housing Strategy will support the delivery of:

- The Thriving Neighbourhood Programme
- The emerging Anti-Poverty Strategy
- The draft *Children and Young Peoples Plan¹⁸*

¹⁶ Reading Borough Council (2008) - *Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*

¹⁷ Reading Borough Council (2008) - *Homelessness Strategy 2008-13*

¹⁸ Reading Borough Council (2009) - *Draft Children and Young Peoples Plan*

- The objectives of the *Safer Communities Strategy*¹⁹ and Adult Social Care strategies

There is also a commitment to reviewing the availability and co-ordination of financial inclusion activities and strategies, including debt counselling, across all tenures and social landlords in the borough, and explore options for increasing access to this service.

The Council will work with our partners and community representatives to review issues affecting Economic Migrants and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.

Tenant and resident engagement with services is an integral part of Reading Borough Council's approach to reviewing and shaping services for the future. For Local Authority tenants, the detailed approach to this is outlined in the draft *Tenant and Customer Involvement Strategy*²⁰ but there is also a commitment to investigate the option of developing tenant and community champions for the private rented sector.

Sub-Regional Working - Reading's place in the Thames Valley

Strategic Objective 10

Maximise cross-boundary working to collectively meet the needs of the region

As outlined in the introduction and context section of the strategy, Reading Borough is the urban centre of a much wider area and the challenges and successes experienced are not contained within the administrative boundaries. For Reading to thrive to its full potential it is key that the Local Authority and partner agencies participate in the production of a new 'Berkshire Housing Strategy' jointly with the five other unitary authorities within Berkshire. Equally, Reading Borough Council will both lead and participate in operational projects across the region; for example, investigating the possibility of sub-regional Choice-Based Lettings and complementary planning policy in relation to Lifetime Homes Standards. Reading will continue to work on a sub-regional basis to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and maintain strong links with regional bodies such as GOSE and the Homes and Communities Agency.

¹⁹ Reading Borough Council (2008) - *Community Safety Strategy*

²⁰ Reading Borough Council (2008) – *Draft Tenant and Customer involvement Strategy*

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Housing Strategy 2009-2014 sets out a bold but achievable vision for communities throughout the region. Set out clearly in ten distinct objectives, delivery will progress the aims of the Sustainable Communities Strategy in relation to the growth of decent and affordable housing. The document will also provide a strategic steer for the Local Authority and its partners as they continue to meet key priorities. Namely, the challenges of evolving supply demands, improving residents' living environments - both in their own homes and in their neighbourhoods - and increasing support for individuals requiring specific accommodation to retain their independence, safety and security. Recognising the place-shaping role held by Reading in the Thames Valley, it is now more essential than ever that we work with neighbouring authorities to help the region thrive. Together, these will be the key outcomes of Reading's Housing Strategy 2009-2014 and in combination; they will deliver a firm foundation for the future.